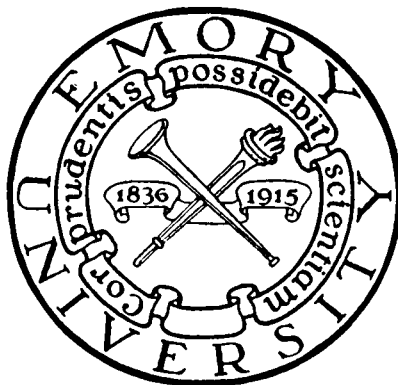


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ANTONINA;

OR,

THE FALL OF ROME.

ANTONINA ;
OR,
THE FALL OF ROME.

A Romance of the Fifth Century.

BY W. WILKIE COLLINS.

AUTHOR OF THE "LIFE OF WILLIAM COLLINS, B.A."

"La ville cesse d'être :
Le Romain est esclave, et le Goth est son maître."
SCUDÉRI, "*Alarique*."

IN THREE VOLUMES.

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BOOK FIRST.

“ Oh where is ruth, or where is pity now ? ”

“ Whither is gentle heart and mercy fled ? ”

Sackville's " Gorboduc "

ANTONINA;
OR,
THE FALL OF ROME.

CHAPTER I.

THE GOTHs.

IT was no false rumour that had driven the populace of the suburbs to fly to the security of the city walls. It was no ill-founded cry of terror that struck the ear of Ulpus, as he stood at Numerian's window. The name of Rome had really lost its pristine terrors; the walls of Rome, those walls which had morally guarded the Empire by their renown, as they had actually guarded its capital by their strength, were deprived at length of their ancient inviolability. An army of barbarians had indeed penetrated for conquest and for vengeance

to the City of the World ! The achievement which the invasions of six hundred years had hitherto attempted in vain, was now accomplished, and accomplished by the men whose forefathers had once fled like hunted beasts to their native fastnesses, before the legions of the Cæsars—"The Goths were at the gates of Rome !"

And now, as his warriors encamped around him, as he saw the arrayed hosts whom his summons had gathered together, and his energy led on, threatening at their doors the corrupt senate who had deceived, and the boastful populace who had despised him, what emotions stirred within the heart of Alaric ? As the words of martial command fell from his lips, and his eyes watched the movements of the multitudes around him, what exalted aspirations, what daring resolves, grew and strengthened in the mind of the man who was the pioneer of that mighty revolution, which swept from one quarter of the world the sway, the civilisation, the very life and spirit of centuries of ancient rule ? High thoughts gathered fast in his mind ; a daring ambition expanded

within him—the ambition, not of the barbarian plunderer, but of the avenger who had come to punish; not of the warrior who combatted for combat's sake, but of the hero who was vowed to conquer and to sway. From the far-distant days when Odin was driven from his territories by the Romans, to the night polluted by the massacre of the hostages in Aquileia, the hour of just and terrible retribution for Gothic wrongs had been delayed through the weary lapse of years, and the warning convulsion of bitter strifes, to approach at last under *him*. He looked on the towering walls before him, the only invader since Hannibal by whom they had been beheld; and he felt as he looked, that his new aspirations did not deceive him, that his dreams of dominion were brightening into proud reality, that his destiny was gloriously linked with the overthrow of Imperial Rome!

But even in the moment of approaching triumph, the leader of the Goths was still wily in purpose and moderate in action. His impatient warriors waited but the word to commence the assault, to pillage the city, and to slaughter the inhabitants;

but he withheld it. Scarcely had the army halted before the gates of Rome, when the news was promulgated among their ranks, that Alaric, for purposes of his own, had determined to reduce the city by a blockade.

The numbers of his forces, increased during his march by the accession of thirty thousand auxiliaries, were now divided into battalions, varying in strength according to the service that was required of them. These divisions stretched round the city walls, and though occupying separate posts, and devoted to separate duties, were so arranged as to be capable of uniting at a signal in any numbers, on any given point. Before each of the twelve principal gates a separate encampment was raised. Multitudes watched the navigation of the Tiber in every possible direction, with untiring vigilance; and not one of the ordinary inlets to Rome, however apparently unimportant, was overlooked.* By these means, every mode of communication between

* Alarichus blocked up the gates all round, and having possessed himself of the river Tiber, obstructed the supply of necessaries from the port to the city.—*Translation of Zosimus, Book V.*

the beleaguered city and the wide and fertile tracts of land around it, was effectually prevented. When it is remembered that this elaborate plan of blockade was enforced against a place containing, at the lowest possible computation, twelve hundred thousand inhabitants, destitute of magazines for food within its walls, dependent for supplies on its regular contributions from the country without, governed by an irresolute senate, and defended by an enervated army, the horrors that now impended over the besieged Romans are as easily imagined as described.*

Among the ranks of the army that now surrounded the doomed city, the division appointed to guard the Pincian Gate will be found, at this juncture, most worthy of the reader's attention ; for one of the warriors appointed to its subordinate command was the young chieftain Hermanric, who had been accompanied by Goisvintha through all the toils and dangers of the march, since the time when we left him at the Italian Alps.

* For the population of Rome, see "Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire," chap. 31, p. 485.

The watch had been set, the tents had been pitched, the defences had been raised on the portion of ground selected to occupy every possible approach to the Pincian Gate, as Hermanric retired to await by Goisvintha's side, whatever further commands he might yet be entrusted with, by his superiors in the Gothic camp. The spot occupied by the young warrior's simple tent was on a slight eminence, apart from the positions chosen by his comrades, eastward of the city gate, and overlooking at some distance the deserted gardens of the suburbs, and the stately palaces of the Pincian Hill. Behind his temporary dwelling was the open country, reduced to a fertile solitude by the flight of its terrified inhabitants; and at each side lay one unvarying prospect of military strength and preparation, stretching out its animated confusion of soldiers, tents, and engines of warfare, as far as the sight could reach. It was now evening. The walls of Rome, enshrouded in a rising mist, showed dim and majestic to the eyes of the Goths. The noises in the beleaguered city softened and deepened, seeming to be muffled in the growing

darkness of the autumn night, and becoming less and less audible as the vigilant besiegers listened to them from their respective posts. One by one, lights broke wildly forth at irregular distances, in the Gothic camp. Harshly and fitfully the shrill call of the signal trumpets rung from rank to rank; and through the dim thick air rose, in the intervals of the more important noises, the clash of heavy hammers and the shout of martial command. Wherever the preparations for the blockade were still incomplete, neither the approach of night nor the pretext of weariness were suffered for an instant to hinder their continued progress. Alaric's indomitable will conquered every obstacle of nature, and every deficiency of man. Darkness had no obscurity that forced him to repose, and lassitude no eloquence that lured him to delay.

In no part of the army had the commands of the Gothic king been so quickly and intelligently executed, as in that appointed to watch the Pincian gate. The interview of Hermanric and Goisvintha in the young chieftain's tent, was, consequently, uninterrupted for a considerable space of time by

any fresh mandate from the head quarters of the camp.

In outward appearance, both the brother and sister had undergone a change remarkable enough to be visible, even by the uncertain light of the torch which now shone on them as they stood together at the door of the tent. The features of Goisvintha—which at the period when we first beheld her on the shores of the mountain lake, retained in spite of her poignant sufferings, much of the lofty and imposing beauty that had been their natural characteristic in her happier days—now preserved not the slightest traces of their former attractions. Its freshness had withered from her complexion, its fulness had departed from her form. Her eyes had contracted an unvarying sinister expression of malignant despair, and her manner had become sullen, repulsive, and distrustful. This alteration in her outward aspect, was but the result of a more perilous change in the disposition of her heart. The death of her last child at the very moment when her flight had successfully directed her to the protection of her people, had affected her more

fatally than all the losses she had previously sustained. The difficulties and dangers that she had encountered in saving her offspring from the massacre ; the dismal certainty that the child was the only one, out of all the former objects of her affection, left to her to love ; the wild sense of triumph that she experienced in remembering, that in this single instance her solitary efforts had thwarted the savage treachery of the Court of Rome, had inspired her with feelings of devotion towards the last of her household which almost bordered on insanity. And, now that her beloved charge, her innocent victim, her future warrior, had, after all her struggles for his preservation, pined and died ; now that she was childless indeed ; now that Roman cruelty had won its end in spite of all her patience, all her courage, all her endurance ; every noble feeling within her sunk, annihilated at the shock. Her sorrow took the fatal form which irretrievably destroys, in women, all the softer and better emotions ;—it changed to the despair that asks no sympathy, to the grief that holds no communion with tears.

Less elevated in intellect and less susceptible in disposition, the change to sullenness of expression and abruptness of manner now visible in Hermanric, resulted rather from his constant contemplation of Goisvintha's gloomy despair, than from any actual revolution in his own character. In truth, however many might be the points of outward resemblance now discernible between the brother and sister, the difference in degree of their moral positions, implied of itself the difference in degree of the inward sorrow of each. Whatever the trials and afflictions that might assail him, Hermanric possessed the healthful elasticity of youth and the martial occupations of manhood to support them. Goisvintha could repose on neither. With no employment but bitter remembrance to engage her thoughts, with no kindly aspiration, no soothing hope to fill her heart, she was abandoned irrevocably to the influence of unpartaken sorrow and vindictive despair.

Both the woman and the warrior stood together in silence for some time. At length, without taking his eyes from the dusky, irregular mass

before him, which was all that night now left visible of the ill-fated city, Hermanric addressed Goisvintha thus :—

“ Have you no words of triumph, as you look on the ramparts that your people have fought for generations to behold at their mercy, thus ? Can a woman of the Goths be silent when she stands before the city of Rome ? ”

“ I came hither to behold Rome pillaged, and Romans slaughtered ; what is Rome *blockaded* to me ? ” replied Goisvintha fiercely. “ The treasures within that city will buy its safety from our King, as soon as the tremblers on the ramparts gain heart enough to penetrate a Gothic camp. Where is the vengeance that you promised me among those distant palaces ? Do I behold you carrying that destruction through the dwellings of Rome, which the soldiers of yonder city carried through the dwellings of the Goths ? Is it for plunder or for glory that the army is here ? I thought, in my woman’s delusion, that it was for revenge ! ”

“ Dishonour will avenge you—Famine will avenge you—Pestilence will avenge you ! ”

“They will avenge my nation ; they will not avenge *me*. I have seen the blood of Gothic women spilt around me—I have looked on my children’s corpses bleeding at my feet ! Will a famine that I cannot see, and a pestilence that I cannot watch, give me vengeance for this ? Look ! Here is the helmet-crest of *my* husband and *your* brother—the helmet-crest that was flung to me as a witness that the Romans had slain him ! Since the massacre of Aquileia it has never quitted my bosom. I have sworn that the blood which stains and darkens it, shall be washed off in the blood of the people of Rome. Though I should perish under those accursed walls ; though you in your soulless patience should refuse me protection and aid : I, widowed, weakened, forsaken as I am, will hold to the fulfilment of my oath !”

As she ceased she folded the crest in her mantle, and turned abruptly from Hermanric in bitter and undissembled scorn. All the attributes of her sex, in thought, expression, and manner, seemed to have deserted her. The very tones she spoke in were harsh and unwomanly.

Every word she had uttered, every action she had displayed, had sunk into the inmost heart, had stirred the fiercest passions of the young warrior whom she addressed. The first national sentiment discoverable in the day-spring of the ages of Gothic history, is the love of war; but the second is the reverence of woman. This latter feeling—especially remarkable among so fierce and unsusceptible a people as the ancient Scandinavians—was entirely unconnected with those strong attaching ties, which are the natural consequence of the warm temperaments of the more southern nations; for love was numbered with the base inferior passions, in the frigid and hardy composition of the warrior of the north. It was the offspring of reasoning and observation, not of instinctive sentiment and momentary impulse. In the wild, poetical code of the old Gothic superstition was one axiom, closely and strangely approximating to an important theory in the Christian scheme—the watchfulness of an omnipotent Creator over a finite creature. Every action of the body, every impulse of the mind, was the immediate result, in

the system of worship among the Goths, of the direct, though invisible interference of the divinities they adored. When, therefore, they observed that women were more submitted in body to the mysterious laws of nature and temperament, and more swayed in mind by the native and universal instincts of humanity than themselves, they inferred as an inevitable conclusion, that the female sex was more incessantly regarded, and more constantly and remarkably influenced by the gods of their worship, than the male. Acting under this persuasion, they committed the study of medicine, the interpretation of dreams, and, in many instances, the mysteries of communication with the invisible world, to the care of their women. The gentler sex became their counsellors in difficulty, and their physicians in sickness,—their companions rather than their mistresses,—the objects of their veneration rather than the purveyors of their pleasures. Although in after years, the national migrations of the Goths changed the national temperament, although their ancient mythology was exchanged for the worship of Christ, this prevailing sentiment

of their earliest existence as a people never entirely deserted them ; but, with different modifications and in different forms, maintained much of its old supremacy through all changes of manners and varieties of customs, descending finally to their posterity among the present nations of Europe, in the shape of that established code of universal courtesy to women, which is admitted to be one great distinguishing mark between the social systems of the inhabitants of civilised and uncivilised lands.*

This powerful and remarkable ascendancy of the woman over the man, among the Goths, could hardly be more strikingly displayed than in the instance of Hermanric. It appeared, not only in the deteriorating effect of the constant companionship of Goisvintha on his naturally manly character, but also in the strong influence over his mind of the last words that she had spoken. His eyes gleamed with anger, his cheeks flushed with shame, as he listened to those passages in her wrathful remonstrance which reflected most bitterly on him-

* See Mallet's " Northern Antiquities."

self. She had scarcely ceased, and turned to retire into the tent, when he arrested her progress, and replied, in heightened and accusing tones:—

“ You wrong me by your words ! When I saw you among the Alps, did I refuse you protection ? When the child was wounded, did I leave him to suffer unaided ? When he died, did I forsake him to rot upon the earth, or abandon to his mother the digging of his grave ? When we approached Aquileia, and marched passed Ravenna, did I forget that the sword hung at my shoulder ? Was it at *my* will that it remained sheathed, or that I entered not the gates of the Roman towns, but passed by them in haste ? Was it not the command of the king that withheld me ; and could I, his warrior, disobey ? I swear it to you, the vengeance that I promised, I yearn to perform,—but is it for *me* to alter the counsels of Alaric ? Can I alone assault the city which it is his command that we should blockade ? What would you have of me ? ”

“ I would have you remember,” retorted Goisvintha, indignantly, “that Romans slew your

brother, and made *me* childless ! I would have you remember that a public warfare of years on years, is powerless to stay one hour's craving of private vengeance ! I would have you less submitted to your general's wisdom, and more devoted to your own wrongs ! I would have you—like me—thirst for the blood of the first inhabitant of yonder den of traitors, who—whether for peace or for war—passes the precincts of its sheltering walls !”

She paused abruptly for an answer, but Hermanric uttered not a word. The courageous heart of the young chieftain recoiled at the deliberate act of assassination, pressed upon him in Goisvintha's veiled yet expressive speech. To act with his comrades in taking the city by assault, to outdo in the heat of battle the worst horrors of the massacre of Aquileia, would have been achievements in harmony with his wild disposition and warlike education ; but, to submit himself to Goisvintha's projects, was a sacrifice, that the very peculiarities of his martial character made repugnant to his thoughts. Emotions such as these he would have communicated to his companion, as they passed

through his mind ; but there was something in the fearful and ominous change that had occurred in her disposition since he had met her among the Alps, in her frantic, unnatural craving for bloodshed and revenge, that gave her a mysterious and powerful influence over his thoughts, his words, and even his actions. He hesitated and was silent.

“ Have I not been patient ? ” continued Goisvintha, lowering her voice to tones of earnest, agitated entreaty, which jarred upon Hermanric’s ear, as he thought who was the petitioner, and what would be the object of the petition,—“ Have I not been patient throughout the weary journey from the Alps ? Have I not waited for the hour of retribution, even before the defenceless cities that we passed on the march ? Have I not at your instigation governed my yearning for vengeance, until the day that should see you mounting those walls with the warriors of the Goths, to scourge with fire and sword the haughty traitors of Rome ? Has that day come ? Is it by this blockade that the requital you promised me over the corpse of my murdered child, is to be performed ? Remem-

ber the perils *I* dared, to preserve the life of that last one of my household,—and will *you* risk nothing to avenge his death? His sepulchre is untended and solitary. Far from the dwellings of his people, lost in the dawn of his beauty, slaughtered in the beginning of his strength, lies the offspring of your brother's blood. And the rest—the two children, who were yet infants; the father, who was brave in battle and wise in council—where are they? Their bones whiten on the shelterless plain, or rot unburied by the ocean shore! Think—had they lived—how happily your days would have passed with them in the time of peace! how gladly your brother would have gone forth with you to the chase! how joyfully his boys would have nestled at your knees, to gather from your lips the first lessons that should form them for the warrior's life! Think of such enjoyments as these, and then think that Roman swords have deprived you of them all!”

Her voice trembled, she ceased for a moment, and looked mournfully up into Hermanric's averted face. Every feature in the young chieftain's countenance

expressed the tumult that her words had aroused within him. He attempted to reply, but his voice was powerless in that trying moment. His head drooped upon his heaving breast, and he sighed heavily as, without speaking, he grasped Goisvintha by the hand. The object she had pleaded for was nearly attained;—he was fast sinking beneath the tempter's well-spread toils!

“Are you silent still?” she gloomily resumed. “Do you wonder at this longing for vengeance, at this craving for Roman blood? I tell you that my desire has arisen within me, at promptings from the voices of an unknown world. They urge me to seek requital on the nation who have widowed and bereaved me—yonder, in their vaunted city, from their pampered citizens, among their cherished homes—in the spot where their shameful counsels take root, and whence their ruthless treacheries derive their bloody source! In the book that our teachers worship, I have heard it read, that ‘the voice of blood crieth from the ground!’ This is the voice—Hermanric, this is the voice that I have heard! I have dreamed that I walked on a shore

of corpses, by a sea of blood—I have seen, arising from that sea, my husband's and my children's bodies, gashed throughout with Roman wounds! They have called to me through the vapour of carnage that was around them;—‘Are we yet un-avenged? Is the sword of Hermanric yet sheathed?’ Night after night have I seen this vision and heard those voices, and hoped for no respite until the day that saw the army encamped beneath the walls of Rome, and raising the scaling-ladders for the assault! And now, after all my endurance, how has that day arrived? Accursed be the lust of treasure! It is more to the warriors, and to you, than the justice of revenge!”

“Listen! listen!” cried Hermanric entreatingly.

“I listen no longer!” interrupted Goisvintha. “The tongue of my people is as a strange language in my ears; for it talks but of plunder and of peace, of obedience, of patience, and of hope! I listen no longer; for the kindred are gone that I loved to listen to—they are all slain by the Romans but you—and you I renounce!”

Deprived of all power of consideration by the

violence of the emotions awakened in his heart by Goisvintha's wild revelations of the evil passion that consumed her, the young Goth, shuddering throughout his whole frame, and still averting his face, murmured in hoarse, unsteady accents: "Ask of me what you will! I have no words to deny, no power to rebuke you—ask of me what you will!"

"Promise me," cried Goisvintha, seizing the hand of Hermanric, and gazing with a look of fierce triumph on his disordered countenance, "that this blockade of the city shall not hinder my vengeance! Promise me that the first victim of our righteous revenge, shall be the first one that appears before you—whether in war or peace—of the inhabitants of Rome!"

"I promise," cried the Goth. And those two words sealed the destiny of his future life.

During the silence that now ensued between Goisvintha and Hermanric, and while each stood absorbed in deep meditation, the dark prospect spread around them began to brighten slowly under a soft, clear light. The moon, whose dull broad

disk had risen among the evening mists arrayed in gloomy red, had now topped the highest of the exhalations of earth, and beamed in the wide heaven, adorned once more in her pale, accustomed hue. Gradually, yet perceptibly, the vapour rolled, —layer by layer,—from the lofty summits of the palaces of Rome, and the high places of the mighty city began to dawn, as it were, in the soft, peaceful, mysterious light; while the lower divisions of the walls, the desolate suburbs, and parts of the Gothic camp, lay still plunged in the dusky obscurity of the mist, in grand and gloomy contrast to the prospect of glowing brightness, that almost appeared to hover about them from above and around. Patches of ground behind the tent of Hermanric, began to grow partially visible in raised and open positions: and the song of the nightingale was now faintly audible at intervals, among the solitary and distant trees. In whatever direction it was observed, the aspect of nature gave promise of the cloudless, tranquil night, of the autumnal climate of ancient Italy.

Hermanric was the first to return to the con-

templation of the outward world. Perceiving that the torch which still burnt by the side of his tent, had become useless, now that the moon had arisen and dispelled the mists, he advanced and extinguished it; pausing afterwards to look forth over the plains, as they brightened slowly before him. He had been thus occupied but a short time, when he thought he discerned a human figure moving slowly over a spot of partially lightened and hilly ground, at a short distance from him. It was impossible that this wandering form could be one of his own people;—they were all collected at their respective posts, and his tent he knew was on the outermost boundary of the encampment before the Pincian Gate.

He looked again. The figure still advanced, but at too great a distance to allow him a chance of discovering, in the uncertain light around him, either its nation, its sex, or its age. His heart misgave him as he remembered his promise to Goisvintha, and contemplated the possibility that it was some miserable slave, abandoned by the fugitives who had quitted the suburbs in the morning,

who now approached, as a last resource, to ask mercy and protection from his enemies in the camp. He turned towards Goisvintha as the idea crossed his mind, and observed that she was still occupied in meditation. Assured by the sight, that she had not yet observed the fugitive figure, he again directed his attention—with an excess of anxiety which he could hardly account for—in the direction where he had first beheld it, but it was no more to be seen. It had either retired to concealment, or was now still advancing towards his tent through a clump of trees that clothed the descent of the hill.

One after another the minutes lagged slowly on, and nothing was yet to be perceived. At length just as Hermanric had begun to doubt whether his senses had not deceived him in all that he had hitherto imagined he had beheld, the fugitive figure suddenly appeared from the trees, hurried with wavering gait over the patch of low, damp ground that still separated it from the young Goth, gained his tent, and then with a feeble cry fell helplessly upon the earth at his feet.

That cry, faint as it was, attracted Goisvintha's attention. She turned in an instant, thrust Hermanric aside, and raised the stranger in her arms. The light, slender form, the fair hand and arm hanging motionless towards the ground, the long locks of deep black hair, heavy with the moisture of the night atmosphere, betrayed the wanderer's sex and age in an instant. The solitary fugitive was a young girl.

Signing to Hermanric to kindle the extinguished torch at a neighbouring watch-fire, Goisvintha carried the still insensible girl into the tent. As the Goth silently proceeded to obey her, a vague, horrible suspicion, that he shrunk from embodying, passed across his mind. His hand shook so that he could hardly light the torch, and bold and vigorous as he was, his limbs trembled beneath him as he slowly returned to the tent.

When he had gained the interior of his temporary abode, the light of his torch illuminated a strange and impressive scene.

Goisvintha was seated on a rude oaken chest, supporting on her knees the form of the young

girl, and gazing with an expression of the most intense and enthralling interest upon her pale, wasted countenance. The tattered robe that had hitherto enveloped the fugitive had fallen back, and disclosed the white dress which was the only other garment she wore. Her face, throat, and arms, had been turned, by exposure to the cold, to the pure whiteness of marble. Her eyes were closed, and her small, delicate features were locked in a rigid repose. But for her deep black hair, which heightened the ghastly aspect of her face, she might have been mistaken, as she lay in the woman's arms, for an exquisitely chiselled statue of youth in death !

When the figure of the young warrior, arrayed in his martial habiliments, and standing near the insensible girl with evident emotions of wonder and anxiety, was added to the group thus produced,—when Goisvintha's tall, powerful frame, clothed in dark garments, and bent over the fragile form and white dress of the fugitive, was illuminated by the wild, fitful glare of the torch,—when the heightened colour, worn features, and eager

expression of the woman were beheld, here shadowed, there brightened, in close opposition to the pale, youthful, reposing countenance of the girl, such an assemblage of violent lights and deep shades was produced, as gave the whole scene a character at once mysterious and sublime. It presented an harmonious variety of solemn colours, united by the exquisite artifice of Nature to a grand, yet simple disposition of form. It was a picture executed by the hand of Rembrandt, and imagined by the mind of Raphael.

Starting abruptly from her long, earnest examination of the fugitive, Goisvintha proceeded to employ herself in restoring animation to her insensible charge. While thus occupied, she preserved unbroken silence. A breathless expectation, that absorbed all her senses in one direction, seemed to have possessed itself of her heart. She laboured at her task with the mechanical, unwavering energy of those, whose attention is occupied by their thoughts rather than their actions. Slowly and unwillingly the first faint flush of returning animation dawned, in the tenderest delicacy of hue, upon the girl's

colourless cheek. Gradually and softly, her quickening respiration fluttered a thin lock of hair that had fallen over her face. A little interval more, and then the closed, peaceful eyes suddenly opened, and glanced quickly round the tent with a wild expression of bewilderment and terror. Then, as Goisvintha rose, and attempted to place her on a seat, she tore herself from her grasp, looked on her for a moment with fearful intentness, and then falling at her feet, murmured, in a plaintive voice,—

“ Have mercy upon me. I am forsaken by my father,—I know not why. The gates of the city are shut against me. My habitation in Rome is closed to me for ever ! ”

She had scarcely spoken these few words, before an ominous change appeared in Goisvintha's countenance. Its former expression of ardent curiosity changed to a look of malignant triumph. Her eyes fixed themselves on the girl's upturned face, in glaring, steady, spell-bound contemplation. She gloated over the helpless creature before her, as the wild beast gloats over the prey that it has secured. Her form dilated, a scornful smile appeared on her lips,

a hot flush rose on her cheeks, and ever and anon she whispered softly to herself, "I knew she was Roman! Aha! I knew she was Roman!"

During this space of time Hermanric was silent. His breath came short and thick, his face grew pale, and his glance, after resting for an instant on the woman and the girl, travelled slowly and anxiously round the tent. In one corner of it lay a heavy battle-axe. He looked for a moment from the weapon to Goisvintha, with a vivid expression of horror, and then moving slowly across the tent, with a firm, yet trembling grasp, he possessed himself of the arm.

As he looked up, Goisvintha approached him. In one hand she held the bloody helmet-crest, while she pointed with the other to the crouching figure of the girl. Her lips were still parted with their unnatural smile, and she whispered softly to the Goth—"Remember your promise!—remember your kindred!—remember the massacre of Aquileia!"

The young warrior made no answer. He moved rapidly forward a few steps, and signed hurriedly to the young girl to fly by the door; but her

terror had by this time divested her of all her ordinary powers of perception and comprehension. She looked up vacantly at Hermanric, and then shuddering violently, crept into a corner of the tent. During the short silence that now ensued, the Goth could hear her shiver and sigh, as he stood watching, with all the anxiety of apprehension, Goisvintha's darkening brow.

"She is Roman—she is the first dweller in the city who has appeared before you!—remember your promise!—remember your kindred!—remember the massacre of Aquileia!" said the woman in fierce, quick, concentrated tones.

"I remember that I am a warrior and a Goth," replied Hermanric, disdainfully. "I have promised to avenge you, but it must be on a man that my promise must be fulfilled—an armed man, who can come forth with weapons in his hand—a strong man of courage whom I will slay in single combat before your eyes! The girl is too young to die, too weak to be assailed!"

Not a syllable that he had spoken had passed unheeded by the fugitive, every word seemed to

revive her torpid faculties. As he ceased she arose, and with the quick instinct of terror, ran up to the side of the young Goth. Then seizing his hand—the hand that still grasped the battle-axe—she knelt down and kissed it, uttering hurried broken ejaculations, as she clasped it to her bosom, which the tremulousness of her voice rendered completely unintelligible.

“Did the Romans think *my* children too young to die, or too weak to be assailed?” cried Goisvintha. “By the Lord God of Heaven, they murdered them the more willingly because they were young, and wounded them the more fiercely because they were weak! my heart leaps within me as I look on the girl! I am doubly avenged, if I am avenged on the innocent and the youthful! Her bones shall rot on the plains of Rome, as the bones of my offspring rot on the plains of Aquileia! Shed me her blood!—Remember your promise!—Shed me her blood!”

She advanced with extended arms and gleaming eyes towards the fugitive. She gasped for breath, her face turned suddenly to a livid paleness, the

torchlight fell full upon her distorted features, she looked unearthly at that fearful moment ; but the divinity of mercy had now braced the determination of the young Goth to meet all emergencies. His bright steady eye quailed not for an instant, as he encountered the frantic glance of the fury before him. With one hand he barred Goisvintha from advancing another step ; the other, he could not disengage from the girl, who now clasped and kissed it more eagerly than before.

“ You do this but to tempt me to anger,” said Goisvintha, altering her manner with sudden and palpable cunning, more ominous of peril to the fugitive than the fury she had hitherto displayed. “ You jest at me, because I have failed in patience, like a child ! But you will shed her blood—you are honourable and will hold to your promise—you will shed her blood ! And I,” she continued, exultingly, seating herself on the oaken chest that she had previously occupied, and resting her clenched hands on her knees : “ I will wait to see it ! ”

At this moment, voices and steps were heard

outside the tent. Hermanric instantly raised the trembling girl from the ground, and supporting her by his arm, advanced to ascertain the cause of the disturbance. He was confronted the next instant by an old warrior of superior rank, attached to the person of Alaric, who was followed by a small party of the ordinary soldiery of the camp.

“Among the women appointed by the king to the office of tending, for this night, those sick and wounded on the march, is Goisvintha, sister of Hermanric. If she is here, let her approach and follow me ;” said the chief of the party in authoritative tones, pausing at door of the tent.

Goisvintha rose. For an instant she stood irresolute. To quit Hermanric at such a time and this, was a sacrifice that wrung her savage heart ;—but she remembered the severity of Alaric’s discipline, she saw the armed men awaiting her, and yielded after a struggle to the imperious necessity of obedience to the king’s commands. Trembling with suppressed anger and bitter disappointment, she whispered to Hermanric as she passed him :—

“You cannot save her if you would ! You dare

not commit her to the charge of your companions, she is too young and too fair to be abandoned to their doubtful protection. You cannot escape with her, for you must remain here on the watch at your post. You will not let her depart by herself, for you know that she would perish with cold and privation before the morning rises. When I return on the morrow I shall see her in the tent. You *cannot* escape from your promise;—you cannot forget it,—you *must* shed her blood!”

“The commands of the king,” said the old warrior, signing to his party to depart with Goisvintha, who now stood with forced calmness awaiting their guidance: “will be communicated to the chieftain Hermanric on the morrow. Remember,” he continued in a lower tone, pointing contemptuously to the trembling girl; “that the vigilance you have shown in setting the watch before yonder gate, will not excuse any negligence your prize there may now cause you to commit! Consult your youthful pleasures as you please, but remember your duties! Farewell!”

Uttering these words in a stern, serious tone, the

veteran departed. Soon the last sound of the footsteps of his escort died away, and Hermanric and the fugitive were left alone in the tent.

During the address of the old warrior to the chieftain, the girl had silently detached herself from her protector's support, and retired hastily to the interior of the tent. When she saw that they were left together again, she advanced hesitatingly towards the young Goth, and looked up with an expression of mute inquiry into his face.

“I am very miserable,” said she, after an interval of silence, in soft, clear, melancholy accents. “If you forsake me now, I must die—and I have lived so short a time on the earth, I have known so little happiness and so little love, that I am not fit to die ! But you will protect me ! You are good and brave, strong with weapons in your hands, and full of pity. You have defended me, and spoken kindly of me—I love you for the compassion you have shown me !”

Her language and actions, simple as they were, were yet so new to Hermanric, whose experience of her sex had been almost entirely limited to the

women of his own stern impassive nation, that he could only reply by a brief assurance of protection, when the suppliant awaited his answer. A new page in the history of humanity was opening before his eyes, and he scanned it in wondering silence.

“If that woman should return,” pursued the girl, fixing her dark, eloquent eyes intently upon the Goth’s countenance, “take me quickly where she cannot come. My heart grows cold as I look on her ! She will kill me if she can approach me again ! My father’s anger is very fearful, but her’s is horrible—horrible—horrible ! Hush ! already I hear her coming back—let us go—I will follow you wherever you please—but let us not delay while there is time to depart ! She will destroy me if she sees me now, and I cannot die yet ! Oh my preserver, my compassionate defender, I cannot die yet !”

“No one shall harm you—no one shall approach you to-night—you are secure from all dangers in this tent,” said the Goth, gazing on her with undissimulated astonishment and admiration.

“I will tell you why death is so dreadful to me,”

He continued, and her voice deepened as she spoke, to tones of mournful solemnity, strangely impressive in a creature so young, “ I have lived much alone, and have had no companions but my thoughts, and the sky that I could look up to, and the things on the earth that I could watch. As I have seen the clear heaven and the soft fields, and smelt the perfume of flowers, and heard the voices of singing-birds afar off, I have wondered why the same God who made all this, and made me, should have made grief and pain and hell—the dread eternal hell that my father speaks of in his church. I never looked at the sun-light, or woke from my sleep to look on and to think of the distant stars, but I longed to love something that might listen to my joy. But my father forbade me to be happy! He frowned even when he gave me my flower-garden—though God made flowers. He destroyed my lute—though God made music. My life has been a longing in loneliness for the voices of friends! My heart has swelled and trembled within me, because when I walked in the garden and looked on the plains and woods and high,

bright mountains that were round me, I knew that I loved them *alone* ! Do you know now why I dare not die ? It is because I must find first the happiness which I feel God has made for me. It is because I must live to praise this wonderful, beautiful world with others who enjoy it as I could ! It is because my home has been among those who sigh, and never among those who smile ! It is for this that I fear to die ! I must find companions whose prayers are in singing and in happiness, before I go to the terrible hereafter that all dread. I dare not die ! I dare not die ! ”

As she uttered these last words she began to weep bitterly. Between amazement and compassion the young Goth was speechless. He looked down upon the small, soft hand that she had placed on his arm while she spoke, and saw that it trembled ; he pressed it, and felt that it was cold ; and in the first impulse of pity produced by the action, he found the readiness of speech which he had hitherto striven for in vain.

“ You shiver and look pale,” said he ; “ a fire shall be kindled at the door of the tent. I will

bring you garments that will warm you, and food that will give you strength; you shall sleep, and I will watch that no one harms you."

The girl hastily looked up. An expression of ineffable gratitude overspread her sorrowful countenance. She murmured in a broken voice, "Oh, how merciful—how merciful you are!" And then, after an evident struggle with herself, she covered her face with her hands, and again burst into tears.

More and more embarrassed, Hermanric mechanically busied himself in procuring from such of his attendants as the necessities of the blockade left free, the supplies of fire, food and raiment, which he had promised. She received the coverings, approached the blazing fuel, and partook of the simple refreshment, which the young warrior offered her, with eagerness. After that, she sat for some time silent, absorbed in deep meditation, and cowering over the fire, apparently unconscious of the curiosity with which she was still regarded by the Goth. At length she suddenly looked up, and observing his eyes fixed on her, arose and beckoned him to the seat that she occupied.

“ Did you know how utterly forsaken I am,” said she, “ you would not wonder as you do, that I, a stranger and a Roman, have sought you thus. I have told you how lonely was my home ; but yet that home was a refuge and a protection to me until the morning of this long day that is past, when I was expelled from it for ever ! I was suddenly awakened in my bed by—my father entered in anger—he called me”——

She hesitated, blushed, and then paused at the very outset of her narrative. Innocent as she was, the natural instincts of her sex spoke, though in a mysterious yet in a warning tone, within her heart, abruptly imposing on her motives for silence that she could neither penetrate nor explain. She clasped her trembling hands over her bosom as if to repress its heaving, and casting down her eyes, continued in a lower tone :—

“ I cannot tell you why my father drove me from his doors. He has always been silent and sorrowful to me ; setting me long tasks in mournful books ; commanding that I should not quit the precincts of his abode, and forbidding me to speak

to him when I have sometimes asked him to tell me of my mother whom I have lost. Yet he never threatened me or drove me from his side, until the morning of which I have told you. Then his wrath was terrible ; his eyes were fierce ; his voice was threatening ! He bade me begone, and I obeyed him in affright, for I thought he would have slain me if I stayed ! I fled from the house, knowing not where I went, and ran through yonder gate, which is hard by our abode. As I entered the suburbs I met great crowds, all hurrying into Rome. I was bewildered by my fears and the confusion all around, yet I remember that they called loudly to me to fly to the city, ere the gates were closed against the assault of the Goths. And others jostled and scoffed at me, as they passed by and saw me in the thin night garments in which I was banished from my home ! ”

Here she paused and listened intently for a few moments. Every accidental noise that she heard, still awakened in her the apprehension of Goisvintha's return. Reassured by Hermanric and by her own observation of all that was passing outside

the tent, she resumed her narrative after an interval, speaking now in a steadier voice.

“ I thought my heart would burst within me,” she continued, “ as I tried to escape them. All things whirled before my eyes. I could not speak,—I could not stop,—I could not weep. I fled and fled I knew not whither, until I sank down exhausted at the door of a small house on the outskirts of the suburbs. Then I called for aid, but no one was by to hear me. I crept—for I could stand no longer—into the house. It was empty. I looked from the windows: no human figure passed through the silent streets. The roar of a mighty confusion still rose from the walls of the city, but I was left to listen to it alone. In the house, I saw scattered on the floor some fragments of bread and an old garment. I took them both, and then rose and departed, for the silence of the place was horrible to me, and I remembered the fields and the plains that I had once loved to look on, and I thought that I might find there the refuge that had been denied to me at Rome ! So I set forth once more, and when I gained the soft

grass, and sat down beside the shady trees, and saw the sunlight brightening over the earth, my heart grew sad, and I wept as I thought on my loneliness and remembered my father's anger.

“ I had not long remained in my resting-place, when I heard a sound of trumpets in the distance, and looking forth, I saw far off, advancing over the plains, a mighty multitude with arms that glittered in the sun. I strove, as I beheld them, to arise and return even to those suburbs whose solitude had affrighted me. But my limbs failed me. I saw a little hollow hidden among the trees around. I entered it ; and there throughout the lonely day I lay concealed. I heard the long tramp of footsteps as your army passed me on the roads beneath : and then, after those hours of fear came the weary hours of solitude !

“ Oh, those—lonely—lonely—lonely hours ! I have lived without companions, but those hours were more terrible to me than all the years of my former life ! I dared not venture to leave my hiding-place—I dared not call ! Alone in the world, I crouched in my refuge till the sun went

down ! Then came the mist, and the darkness, and the cold. The bitter winds of night thrilled through and through me ! The lonely obscurity around me seemed filled with phantoms whom I could not behold, who touched me and rustled over the surface of my skin ! They half maddened me ! I rose to depart ; to meet my wrathful father, or the army that had passed me, or solitude in the cold, bright meadows—I cared not which !—when I discerned the light of your torch, the moment ere it was extinguished. Dark though it then was, I found your tent. And now I know that I have found yet more—a companion and a friend ! ”

She looked up at the young Goth as she pronounced these words, with the same grateful expression that had appeared on her countenance before ; but this time her eyes were not dimmed by tears. Already her disposition—poor as was the prospect of happiness which now lay before it—had begun to return, with an almost infantine facility of change, to the restoring influences of the brighter emotions. Already the short tranquillities

of the present, began to exert for her their effacing charm over the long agitations of the past. Despair was unnumbered among the emotions that grew round that child-like heart ; shame, fear, and grief, however they might overshadow it for a time, left no taint of their presence on its bright, fine surface. Tender, perilously alive to sensation, strangely retentive of kindness as she was by nature, the very solitude to which she had been condemned, had gifted her, young as she was, with a martyr's endurance of ill, and with a stoic's patience under pain.

“Do not mourn for me now,” she pursued, gently interrupting some broken expressions of compassion which fell from the lips of the young Goth. “If *you* are merciful to me, I shall forget all that I have suffered ! Though your nation is at enmity with mine, while you remain my friend, I fear nothing ! I can look on your great stature and heavy sword and bright armour now, without trembling ! You are not like the soldiers of Rome ; —you are taller, stronger, more gloriously arrayed ! You are like a statue I once saw by chance of a

warrior of the Greeks ! You have a look of conquest, and a presence of command ! ”

She gazed on the manly and powerful frame of the young warrior, clothed as it was in the accoutrements of his warlike nation, with an expression of childish interest and astonishment, asking him the appellation and use of each part of his equipment, as it attracted her attention, and ending her inquiries by eagerly demanding his name.

“ Hermanric,” she repeated, as he answered her, pronouncing with some difficulty the harsh Gothic syllables,—“ Hermanric !—that is a stern, solemn name—a name fit for a warrior and a man ! Mine sounds worthless, after such a name as that ! It is only Antonina ! ”

Deeply as he was interested in every word uttered by the girl, Hermanric could no longer fail to perceive the evident traces of exhaustion that now appeared in the slightest of her actions. Producing some furs from a corner of the tent, he made a sort of rude couch by the side of the fire, heaped fresh fuel on the flames, and then gently counselled her to recruit her wasted energies by repose.

There was something so candid in his manner, so sincere in the tones of his voice, as he made his simple offer of hospitality to the stranger who had taken refuge with him, that the most distrustful woman would have accepted it with as little hesitation as Antonina; who, gratefully and unhesitatingly, laid down on the bed that he had been spreading for her at her feet.

As soon as he had carefully covered her with a cloak, and re-arranged her couch in the position best calculated to insure her all the warmth of the burning fuel, Hermanric retired to the other side of the fire; and, leaning on his sword, abandoned himself to the new and absorbing reflections which the presence of the girl naturally aroused.

He thought not on the duties demanded of him by the blockade; he remembered neither the scene of rage and ferocity that had followed his evasion of his reckless promise; nor the fierce determination that Goisvintha had expressed as she quitted him for the night. The cares and toils to come with the new morning, which would oblige him to expose the fugitive to the malignity of her revenge-

ful enemy ; the thousand contingencies that the difference of their sexes, their nations, and their lives, might create to oppose the continuance of the permanent protection that he had promised to her, caused him no forebodings. Antonina, and Antonina alone, occupied every faculty of his mind, and every feeling of his heart. There was a softness and a melody to his ear in her very name !

His early life had made him well acquainted with the Latin tongue, but he had never discovered all its native smoothness of sound and elegance of structure, until he had heard it spoken by Antonina. Word by word, he passed over in his mind her varied, natural, and happy turns of expression ; recalling, as he was thus employed, the eloquent looks, the rapid gesticulations, the changing tones which had accompanied those words, and thinking how wide was the difference between this young daughter of Rome, and the cold and taciturn women of his own nation. The very mystery enveloping her story, which would have excited the suspicion or contempt of more civilised men, aroused in him no other emotions than those of

wonder and compassion. No feelings of a lower nature than these entered his heart towards the girl. She was safe under the protection of the enemy and the barbarian, after having been lost through the interference of the Roman and the senator.

To the simple perceptions of the Goth, the discovery of so much intelligence united to such extreme youth, of so much beauty doomed to such utter loneliness, was the discovery of an apparition that dazzled, and not of a woman who charmed him. He could not even have touched the hand of the helpless creature, who now reposed under his tent, unless she had extended it to him of her own accord. He could only think—with a delight whose excess he was far from estimating himself—on this solitary, mysterious being who had come to him for shelter and for aid ; who had awakened in him already new sources of sensation ; and who seemed to his startled imagination to have suddenly twined herself for ever about the destinies of his future life.

He was still deep in meditation, when he was

startled by a hand suddenly laid on his arm. He looked up and saw that Antonina, whom he had imagined to be slumbering on her couch, was standing by his side.

“ I cannot sleep,” said the girl in a low, awe-struck voice, “ until I have asked you to spare my father when you enter Rome. I know that you are here to ravage the city ; and, for aught I can tell, you may assault and destroy it to-night. Will you promise to warn me before the walls are assailed ? I will then tell you my father’s name and abode, and you will spare *him* as you have mercifully spared *me* ? He has denied me his protection, but he is my father still ; and I remember that I disobeyed him once, when I possessed myself of a lute ! Will you promise me to spare him ? My mother, whom I have never seen and who must therefore be dead, may love me in another world for pleading for my father’s life ! ”

In a few words, Hermanric quieted her agitation by explaining to her the nature and intention of the Gothic blockade, and she silently returned to the couch. After a short interval, her slow,

regular breathing announced to the young warrior, as he watched by the side of the fire, that she had at length forgotten the day's heritage of misfortune in the welcome oblivion of sleep.

CHAPTER II.

THE TWO INTERVIEWS.

THE time, is the evening of the first day of the Gothic blockade ; the place, is Vetrano's palace at Rome. In one of the private apartments of his mansion is seated its all-accomplished owner, released at length from the long sitting convened by the Senate on the occasion of the unexpected siege of the city. Although the same complete discipline, the same elegant regularity, and the same luxurious pomp, which distinguished the senator's abode in times of security, still prevail over it in the time of imminent danger which now threatens rich and poor alike in Rome, Vetrano himself appears far from partaking the tranquillity of his patrician household. His manner displays an unusual sternness, and his face an unwonted displeasure, as

he sits, occupied by his silent reflections and thoroughly unregardful of whatever occurs around him. Two ladies who are his companions in the apartment, exert all their blandishments to win him back to hilarity, but in vain. The services of his expectant musicians are not put into requisition, the delicacies on his table remain untouched, and even "the inestimable kitten of the breed most worshipped by the ancient Egyptains" gambols unnoticed and unapplauded at his feet. It is plainly evident that its wonted philosophical equanimity has departed, for the time at least, from the senator's mind.

Silence—hitherto a stranger to the palace apartments—had reigned uninterruptedly over them for some time, when the freed-man Carrio interrupted Vetranio's meditations, and put the ladies who were with him to flight, by announcing in an important voice, that the Prefect Pompeianus desired a private interview with the Senator Vetranio.

The next instant the chief magistrate of Rome entered the apartment. He was a short, fat, un-

dignified man. Indolence and vacillation were legibly impressed on his appearance and expression. You saw, in a moment, that his mind, like a shuttlecock, might be urged in any direction by the efforts of others, but was utterly incapable of volition by itself. But once in his life had the Prefect Pompeianus been known to arrive unaided at a positive determination, and that was in deciding a fierce argument between a bishop and a general, regarding the relative merits of two rival rope-dancers of equal renown.

“I have come, my beloved friend,” said the Prefect in agitated tones, “to ask your opinion, at this period of awful responsibility for us all, on the plan of operations proposed by the Senate at the sitting of to-day! But first,” he hastily continued, perceiving with the unerring instinct of an old gastronome, that the inviting refreshments on Vetranio’s table had remained untouched, “permit me to fortify my exhausted energies by a visit to your ever-luxurious board. Alas, my friend, when I consider the present fearful scarcity of our provision stores in the city, and the length of time

that this accursed blockade may be expected to last, I am inclined to think that the gods alone know (I mean St. Peter) how much longer we may be enabled to give occupation to our digestions and employment to our cooks.

“I have observed,” pursued the Prefect, after an interval, speaking with his mouth full of stewed peacock; “I have observed, oh esteemed colleague! the melancholy of your manner and your absolute silence during your attendance to-day at our deliberations. Have we, in your opinion, decided erroneously? It is not impossible! Our confusion at this unexpected appearance of the barbarians may have blinded our usual penetration! If by any chance you dissent from our plans, I beseech you communicate it to me without reserve!”

“I dissent from nothing, because I have heard nothing,” replied Vetrano sullenly. “I was so occupied by a private matter of importance during my attendance at the sitting of the Senate, that I was deaf to their deliberations. I know that we are besieged by the Goths — why are they not driven from before the walls?”

“Deaf to our deliberations! Drive the Goths from the walls!” repeated the Prefect faintly. “Can you think of any private matter at such a moment as this? Do you know our danger? Do you know that our friends are so astonished at this frightful calamity, that they move about like men half awakened from a dream? Have you not seen the streets filled with terrified and indignant crowds? Have you not mounted the ramparts and beheld the innumerable multitudes of pitiless Goths surrounding us on all sides, intercepting our supplies of provisions from the country, and menacing us with a speedy famine, unless our hoped-for auxiliaries arrive from Ravenna? Do you not know, that the legions we have in the city are not sufficient to guard more than half the circuit of the walls? Has no one informed you that if it should please the leader of the barbarians to change his blockade into an assault, it is more than probable that we should be unable to repulse him successfully? Deaf to our deliberations, when your palace may to-morrow be burnt over your head, when we may be starved to death, when we

may be doomed to eternal dishonour by being driven to conclude a peace ! Deaf to our deliberations, when such an unimaginable calamity as this invasion has fallen like a thunderbolt under our very walls ! You amaze me ! You overwhelm me ! You horrify me ! ”

And in the excess of his astonishment the bewildered Prefect actually abandoned his stewed peacock, and advanced, wine-cup in hand, to obtain a nearer view of the features of his imperturbable host.

“ If we are not strong enough to drive the Goths out of Italy,” rejoined Vetrano coolly, “ you and the Senate know that we are rich enough to bribe them to depart to the remotest confines of the Empire. If we have not swords enough to fight, we have gold and silver enough to pay.”

“ You are jesting ! Remember our honour and the auxiliaries we still hope for from Ravenna,” said the Prefect reprovingly.

“ Honour has lost the signification now, that it had in the time of the Cæsars,” retorted the Senator. “ Our fighting days are over. We have had heroes enough for our reputation. As for the auxiliaries

you still hope for, you will have none ! While the Emperor is safe in Ravenna, he will care nothing for the worst extremities that can be suffered by the people of Rome."

"But you forget your duties," urged the astonished Pompeianus, turning from rebuke to expostulation. "You forget that it is a time when all private interests must be abandoned ! You forget that I have come here to ask your advice, that I am bewildered by a thousand projects, forced on me from all sides, for ruling the city successfully during the blockade ; that I look to you, as a friend and a man of reputation, to aid me in deciding on a choice out of the varied counsels submitted to me in the Senate to-day ! Would you really persuade me you are ignorant that what sentinels we have, are doubled already on the walls ? Would you attempt to declare seriously to me, that you never heard the project of Saturninus for reducing imperceptibly the diurnal allowance of provisions ? Or the recommendation of Emilianus, that the people should be kept from thinking on the dangers and extremities which now threaten them, by being

provided incessantly with public amusements at the theatres and hippodromes? Do you really mean that you are indifferent to the horrors of our present situation? By the souls of the Apostles, Vetranio, I begin to think that you do not believe in the Goths!"

"I have already told you that private affairs occupy me at present, to the exclusion of public," said Vetranio impatiently. "Debate as you choose—approve what projects you will—I withdraw myself from interference in your deliberations!"

"This," murmured the repulsed Prefect in soliloquy, as he mechanically resumed his place at the refreshment table, "this is the very end and climax of all calamities! Now, when advice and assistance are more precious than jewels in my estimation, I receive neither! I gain from none, the wise and saving counsels which, as chief magistrate of this Imperial City, it is my right to demand from all; and the man on whom I most depended is the man who fails me most! Yet hear me, oh Vetranio, once again," he continued, addressing the Senator, "if our perils beyond the walls affect

you not, there is a weighty matter that has been settled within them, which must move you. After you had quitted the Senate, Serena, the widow of Stilicho, was accused, as her husband was accused before her, of secret and treasonable correspondence with the Goths; and has been condemned, as her husband was condemned, to suffer the penalty of death. I myself discerned no evidence to convict her; but the populace cried out, in universal frenzy, that she was guilty, that she should die; and that the barbarians, when they heard of the punishment inflicted on their secret adherent, would retire in dismay from Rome. This also was a moot point of argument, on which I vainly endeavoured to decide; but the Senate and the people were wiser than I; and Serena was condemned to be strangled to-morrow, by the public executioner. She was a woman of good report before this time, and is the adopted mother of the Emperor. It is now doubted by many whether Stilicho, her husband, was ever guilty of the correspondence with the Goths, of which he was accused; and I, on my part, doubt much that Serena has deserved the

punishment of death at our hands. I beseech you, Vetranio, let me be enlightened by your opinion on this one point at least ! ” *

The Prefect waited anxiously for an answer, but Vetranio neither looked at him nor replied. It was evident that the senator had not listened to a word that he had said !

This reception of his final appeal for assistance, produced the effect on the petitioner, which it was perhaps designed to convey—the Prefect Pompeianus quitted the room in despair.

He had not long departed, when Carrio again entered the apartment, and addressed his master thus :

“ It is grievous for me, revered patron, to disclose it to you, but your slaves have returned unsuccessful from the search ! ”

“ Give the description of the girl to a fresh division of them, and let them continue their efforts throughout the night, not only in the streets, but in all the houses of public entertainment in the city.

* See “ Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire,” chap. xxxi., p. 415.

She *must* be in Rome, and she *must* be found !” said the senator gloomily.

Carrio bowed profoundly and was about to depart, when he was arrested at the door by his master’s voice.

“If an old man, calling himself Numerian, should desire to see me,” said Vetrano, “admit him instantly.”

“She had quitted the room but a short time when I attempted to reclaim her,” pursued the senator, speaking to himself; “and yet when I gained the open air, she was nowhere to be seen ! She must have mingled unintentionally with the crowds whom the Goths drove into the city, and thus have eluded my observation ! So young and so innocent ! She must be found ! She must be found !”

He paused, once more engrossed in deep and melancholy thought. After a long interval, he was roused from his abstraction by the sound of footsteps on the marble floor. He looked up. The door had been opened without his perceiving it, and an old man was advancing with slow and trembling

steps towards his silken couch. It was the bereaved and broken-hearted Numerian.

“Where is she? Is she found?” asked the father, gazing anxiously round the room, as if he had expected to see his daughter there.

“My slaves still search for her,” said Vetranio, mournfully.

“Ah, woe—woe—woe! How I wronged her! How I wronged her!” cried the old man, turning to depart.

“Listen to me ere you go,” said Vetranio, gently detaining him. “I have done you a great wrong, but I will yet atone for it by finding for you, your child! While there were women who would have triumphed in my admiration, I should not have attempted to deprive you of your daughter! Remember when you recover her—and you shall recover her—that from the time when I first decoyed her into listening to my lute, to the night when your traitorous servant led me to her bed-chamber, she has been innocent in this ill-considered matter. I alone have been guilty! She was scarcely awakened when you discovered her in my

arms, and my entry into her chamber, was as little expected by her, as it was by you. I was bewildered by the fumes of wine and the astonishment of your sudden appearance, or I should have rescued her from your anger, ere it was too late! The events which have passed this morning, confused as they have been, have yet convinced me that I had mistaken you both. I now know that your child was too pure to be an object fitted for *my* pursuit; and I believe that in secluding her as you did, however ill-advised you might appear, you were honest in your design! Never in my pursuit of pleasure did I commit so fatal an error, as when I entered the doors of your house!"

In pronouncing these words, Vetricio but gave expression to the sentiments by which they were really inspired. As we have before observed, profligate as he was by thoughtlessness of character and license of social position, he was neither heartless nor criminal by nature. Fathers had stormed, but his generosity had hitherto invariably pacified them. Daughters had wept, but had found consolation on all previous occasions in the

splendour of his palace and the amiability of his disposition. In attempting, therefore, the abduction of Antonina, though he had prepared for unusual obstacles, he had expected no worse results of his new conquest, than those that had followed, as yet, his gallantries that were past. But, when—in the solitude of his own home, and in the complete possession of his faculties—he recalled all the circumstances of his attempt, from the time when he had stolen on the girl's slumbers, to the moment when she had fled from the house : when he remembered the stern concentrated anger of Numerian, and the agony and despair of Antonina ; when he thought on the spirit-broken repentance of the deceived father, and the fatal departure of the injured daughter, he felt as a man who had not merely committed an indiscretion, but had been guilty of a crime ; he became convinced that he had incurred the fearful responsibility of destroying the happiness of a parent who was really virtuous, and a child who was truly innocent. To a man, the business of whose whole life was to procure for himself a heritage of unalloyed pleasure, whose sole

occupation was to pamper that refined sensuality which the habits of a life had made the very material of his heart, by diffusing luxury and awakening smiles wherever he turned his steps, the mere mental disquietude attending the ill-success of his intrusion into Numerian's dwelling, was as painful in its influence, as the bitterest remorse that could have afflicted a more highly-principled mind. He now, therefore, instituted the search after Antonina, and expressed his contrition to her father, from a genuine persuasion that nothing but the completest atonement for the error he had committed, could restore to him that luxurious tranquillity, the loss of which had, as he had himself expressed it, rendered him deaf to the deliberations of the Senate, and regardless of the invasion of the Goths.

“Tell me,” he continued, after a pause, “whither has Ulpius betaken himself? It is necessary that he should be discovered. He may enlighten us upon the place of Antonina's retreat. He shall be secured and questioned.”

“He left me suddenly ; I saw him as I stood at

the window, mix with the multitude in the street, but I know not whither he is gone," replied Numerian; and a tremor passed over his whole frame as he spoke of the remorseless Pagan.

Again there was a short silence. The grief of the broken-spirited father, possessed in its humility and despair, a voice of rebuke, before which the senator, careless and profligate as he was, instinctively quailed. For some time he endeavoured in vain to combat the silencing and reproving influence, exerted over him by the very presence of the sorrowing man whom he had so fatally wronged. At length, after an interval, he recovered self-possession enough to address to Numerian some further expressions of consolation and hope; but he spoke to ears that listened not. The father had relapsed into his mournful abstraction; and when the senator paused, he merely muttered to himself—"She is lost! Alas, she is lost for ever!"

"No, she is not lost for ever," cried Vetranio, warmly. "I have wealth and power enough to cause her to be sought for to the ends of the earth!"

Ulpus shall be secured and questioned—imprisoned, tortured, if it is necessary. Your daughter *shall* be recovered. Nothing is impossible to a senator of Rome !”

“ I knew not that I loved her, until the morning when I wronged and banished her !” continued the old man, still speaking to himself. “ I have lost all trace of my parents and my brother—my wife is parted from me for ever—I have nothing left but Antonina ; and now she too is gone ! Even my ambition, that I once thought my all in all, is no comfort to my soul ; for I loved it—alas ! unconsciously loved it—through the being of my child ! I destroyed her lute—I thought her shameless—I drove her from my doors ! Oh, how I wronged her !—how I wronged her ! ”

“ Remain here, and repose yourself in one of the sleeping apartments, until my slaves return in the morning. You will then hear without delay of the result of their search to-night,” said Vetranio, in kindly and compassionate tones.

“ It grows dark—dark !” groaned the father, tottering towards the door ; “ but that is nothing :

daylight itself now looks darkness to me ! I must go : I have duties at the chapel to perform. Night is repose for *you*—for *me*, it is tribulation and prayer !”

He departed as he spoke. Slowly he paced along the streets that led to his chapel, glancing with penetrating eye at each inhabitant of the besieged city who passed him on his way. With some difficulty he arrived at his destination ; for Rome was still thronged with armed men hurrying backwards and forwards, and with crowds of disorderly citizens pouring forth, wherever there was space enough for them to assemble. The report of the affliction that had befallen him had already gone abroad among his hearers, and they whispered anxiously to each other as he entered the plain, dimly-lighted chapel, and slowly mounted the pulpit to open the service, by reading the chapter in the Bible which had been appointed for perusal that night, and which happened to be the fifth of the Gospel of St. Mark. His voice trembled, his face was ghastly pale, and his hands shook perceptibly as he began ; but he read on, in low, broken tones, and with evident

pain and difficulty, until he came to the verse containing these words: "My little daughter lieth at the point of death." Here he stopped suddenly, endeavoured vainly for a few minutes to proceed, and then, covering his face with his hands, sank down in the pulpit and sobbed aloud. His distressed and startled audience immediately gathered round him, raised him in their arms, and prepared to conduct him to his own abode. When, however, they had gained the door of the chapel, he desired them gently, to leave him and return to the performance of the service among themselves. Ever implicitly obedient to his slightest wishes, the persons of his little assembly, moved to tears by the sight of their teacher's suffering, obeyed him, by retiring silently to their former places. As soon as he found that he was alone, he passed the door; and whispering to himself, "I must join those who seek her! I must aid them myself in the search!"—he mingled once more with the disorderly citizens who thronged the darkened streets.

CHAPTER III.



THE RIFT IN THE WALL.

WHEN Ulpius suddenly departed from Numerian's house on the morning of the siege, it was with no distinct intention of betaking himself to any particular place, or devoting himself to any immediate employment. It was to give vent to his joy—to the ecstasy that now filled his heart to bursting—that he sought the open streets. His whole moral being was exalted by that overwhelming sense of triumph, which urges the physical nature into action. He hurried into the free air, as a child runs on a bright day in the wide fields ; his delight was too wild to expand under a roof ; his excess of bliss swelled irrepressibly beyond all artificial limits of space.

The Goths were in sight ! A few hours more,

and their scaling ladders would be planted against the walls. On a city so weakly guarded as Rome, their assault must be almost instantaneously successful. Thirsting for plunder, they would descend in infuriated multitudes on the defenceless streets. Christians though they were, the restraints of religion would, in that moment of fierce triumph, be powerless with such a nation of marauders against the temptations to pillage. Churches would be ravaged and destroyed; priests would be murdered in attempting the defence of their ecclesiastical treasures; fire and sword would waste to its remotest confines the stronghold of Christianity, and overwhelm in death and oblivion the boldest of Christianity's devotees! Then, when the hurricane of ruin and crime had passed over the city, when a new people were ripe for another government and another religion—then would be the time to invest the banished gods of old Rome with their former rule; to bid the survivors of the stricken multitude remember the judgment that their apostacy to their ancient faith had demanded and incurred; to strike the

very remembrance of the Cross out of the memory of man ; and to reinstate Paganism on her throne of sacrifices, and under her roof of gold, more powerful from her past persecutions ; more universal in her sudden restoration, than in all the glories of her ancient rule !

Such thoughts as these passed through the Pagan's toiling mind as, unobservant of all outward events, he paced through the streets of the beleaguered city. Already he beheld the army of the Goths preparing the way, as the unconscious pioneers of the returning gods, for the march of that mighty revolution which he was determined to lead. The warmth of his past eloquence, the glow of his old courage, thrilled through his heart, as he figured to himself the prospect that would soon stretch before him—a city laid waste, a people terrified, a government distracted, a religion destroyed. *Then*, arising amid this darkness and ruin ; amid this solitude, desolation, and decay, it would be *his* glorious privilege to summon an unfaithful people to return to the mistress of their ancient love ; to rise from prostration beneath

a dismantled Church ; and to seek prosperity in temples repeopled and at shrines restored !

All remembrance of late events now entirely vanished from his mind. Numerian, Vetricio, Antonina, they were all forgotten in this memorable advent of the Goths ! His slavery in the mines, his last visit to Alexandria, his earlier wanderings—even these, so present to his memory until the morning of the siege, were swept from its very surface now. Age, solitude, infirmity—hitherto the mournful sensations which were proofs to him that he still continued to exist—suddenly vanished from his perceptions, as things that were not ; and now at length he forgot that he was an outcast, and remembered triumphantly that he was still a priest. He felt animated by the same hopes, elevated by the same aspirations, as in those early days when he had harangued the wavering Pagans in the Temple, and first plotted the overthrow of the Christian Church.

It was a terrible and warning proof of the omnipotent influence that a single idea may exercise over a whole life, to see that old man wandering

among the crowds around him, still enslaved, after years of suffering and solitude, degradation, and crime, by the same ruling ambition, which had crushed the promise of his early youth ! It was an awful testimony to the eternal and mysterious nature of thought, to behold that wasted and weakened frame ; and then to observe how the unassailable mind within, still swayed the wreck of body yet left to it—how faithfully the last exhausted resources of failing vigour rallied into action at its fierce command—how quickly, at its mocking voice, the sunken eye lightened again with a gleam of hope, and the pale, thin lips parted mechanically with an exulting smile !

The hours passed, but he still walked on—whither or among whom he neither knew nor cared. No remorse touched his heart for the destruction that he had wreaked on the Christian who had sheltered him ; no terror appalled his soul at the contemplation of the miseries that he believed to be in preparation for the city from the enemy at its gates. The end that had hallowed to him the long series of his former offences and former sufferings,

now obliterated iniquities just passed, and stripped of all their horrors, atrocities immediately to come.

The Goths might be destroyers to others, but they were benefactors to *him* ; for they were harbingers of the ruin which would be the material of his reform, and the source of his triumph. It never entered his imagination that, as an inhabitant of Rome, he shared the approaching perils of the citizens, and in the moment of the assault might share their doom. He beheld only the new and gorgeous prospect that war and rapine were opening before him. He thought only of the time that must elapse ere his new efforts could be commenced—of the orders of the people among whom he should first make his voice heard—of the Temples which he should select for restoration—of the quarter of Rome which should first be chosen for the reception of his daring reform.

At length he paused ; his exhausted energies yielded under the exertions imposed on them, and obliged him to bethink himself of refreshment and repose. It was now noon. The course of his

wanderings had insensibly brought him back to the precincts of his old, familiar dwelling-place; he found himself at the back of the Pincian Mount, and only separated by a strip of uneven woody ground, from the base of the city wall. The place was very solitary. It was divided from the streets and mansions above by thick groves and extensive gardens, which stretched along the undulating descent of the hill. A short distance to the westward lay the Pincian Gate, but an abrupt turn in the wall and some olive trees which grew near it, shut out all view of objects in that direction. On the other side, towards the eastward, the ramparts were discernible, running in a straight line of some length, until they suddenly turned inwards at a right angle and were concealed from further observation by the walls of a distant palace and the pine trees of a public garden. The only living figure discernible near this lonely spot, was that of a sentinel, who occasionally passed over the ramparts above, which—situated as they were between two stations of soldiery, one at the Pincian Gate and the other where the wall made the angle already

described—were untenanted, save by the guard within the limits of whose watch they happened to be placed. Here, for a short space of time, the Pagan rested his wearied frame, and aroused himself insensibly from the enthralling meditations which had hitherto blinded him to the troubled aspect of the world around him.

He now for the first time heard on all sides distinctly, the confused noises which still rose from every quarter of Rome. The same incessant strife of struggling voices and hurrying footsteps, which had caught his ear in the early morning, attracted his attention now; but no shrieks of distress, no clash of weapons, no shouts of fury and defiance, were mingled with them; although, as he perceived by the position of the sun, the day had sufficiently advanced to have brought the Gothic army long since to the foot of the walls. What could be the cause of this delay in the assault; of this ominous tranquillity on the ramparts above him? Had the impetuosity of the Goths suddenly vanished at the sight of Rome? Had negotiations for peace been organised with the first appearance of the invaders?

He listened again. No sounds caught his ear differing in character from those he had just heard. Though besieged, the city was evidently—from some mysterious cause—not even threatened by an assault.

Suddenly there appeared from a little pathway near him, which led round the base of the wall, a woman preceded by a child, who called to her impatiently, as he ran on, “Hasten, mother, hasten! There is no crowd here. Yonder is the Gate. We shall have a noble view of the Goths!”

There was something in the address of the child to the woman, that gave Ulpus a suspicion, even then, of the discovery that flashed upon him soon after. He rose and followed them. They passed onward by the wall, through the olive trees beyond, and then gained the open space before the Pincian Gate. Here a great concourse of people had assembled, and were suffered, in their proper turn, to ascend the ramparts in divisions, by some soldiers who guarded the steps by which they were approached. After a short delay, Ulpus and those around him were permitted to gratify

their curiosity, as others had done before them. They mounted the walls, and beheld, stretched over the ground within and beyond the suburbs. the vast circumference of the Gothic lines.

Terrible and almost sublime as was the prospect of that immense multitude, seen under the brilliant illumination of the noontide sun, it was not impressive enough to silence the turbulent loquacity rooted in the dispositions of the people of Rome. Men, women, and children, all made their noisy and conflicting observations on the sight before them, in every variety of tone, from the tremulous accents of terror, to the loud vociferations of bravado.

Some spoke boastfully of the achievements that would be performed by the Romans, when their expected auxiliaries arrived from Ravenna. Others foreboded, in undissembled terror, an assault under cover of the night. Here, a group abused, in low, confidential tones, the policy of the government in its past relations with the Goths. There, a company of ragged vagabonds amused themselves by pompously confiding to each other their positive

conviction, that at that very moment the barbarians must be trembling in their camp, at the mere sight of the all-powerful Capital of the World. In one direction, people were heard noisily speculating whether the Goths would be driven from the walls by the soldiers of Rome, or be honoured by an invitation to conclude a peace with the august Empire, which they had so treasonably ventured to invade. In another, the more sober and reputable among the spectators audibly expressed their apprehensions of starvation, dishonour, and defeat, should the authorities of the city be foolhardy enough to venture a resistance to Alaric and his barbarian hosts. But wide as was the difference of the particular opinions hazarded among the citizens, they all agreed in one unavoidable conviction, that Rome had escaped the immediate horrors of an assault, to be threatened—if unaided by the legions at Ravenna—by the prospective miseries of a blockade.

Amid the confusion of voices around him, that word “blockade” alone reached the Pagan’s ear. It brought with it a flood of emotions that over-

whelmed him. All that he saw, all that he heard, connected itself imperceptibly with that expression. A sudden darkness, neither to be dissipated nor escaped, seemed to obscure his faculties in an instant. He struggled mechanically through the crowd, descended the steps of the ramparts, and returned to the solitary spot where he had first beheld the woman and the child.

The city was blockaded ! The Goths were bent then, on obtaining a peace and not on achieving a conquest ! The city was blockaded ! It was no error of the ignorant multitude—he had seen with his own eyes the tents and positions of the enemy, he had heard the soldiers on the wall discoursing on the admirable disposition of Alaric's forces, on the impossibility of obtaining the smallest communication with the surrounding country, on the vigilant watch that had been set over the navigation of the Tiber. There was no doubt on the matter—the barbarians had determined on a blockade !

There was even less uncertainty upon the results which would be produced by this unimaginable policy of the Goths—the city would be saved !

Rome had not scrupled in former years to purchase the withdrawal of all enemies from her distant provinces ; and now that the very centre of her glory, the very pinnacle of her declining power, was threatened with sudden and unexpected ruin, she would lavish on the Goths the treasures of the whole empire, to bribe them to peace and to tempt them to retreat. The senate might possibly delay the necessary concessions, from hopes of assistance that would never be realised ; but sooner or later the hour of negotiation would arrive ; northern rapacity would be satisfied with southern wealth ; and in the very moment when it seemed inevitable, the ruin from which the Pagan revolution was to derive its vigorous source, would be diverted from the churches of Rome.

Could the old renown of the Roman name have retained so much of its ancient influence as to daunt the hardy Goths, after they had so successfully penetrated the empire as to have reached the walls of its vaunted capital ? Could Alaric have conceived so exaggerated an idea of the strength of the forces in the city as to despair, with all his multitudes,

of storming it with success? It could not be otherwise! No other consideration could have induced the barbarian general to abandon so glorious an achievement as the destruction of Rome. With the chance of an assault the prospects of Paganism had brightened—with the certainty of a blockade, they sunk immediately into disheartening gloom!

Filled with these thoughts, Ulpius paced backwards and forwards in his solitary retreat, utterly abandoned by the exaltation of feeling which had restored to his faculties in the morning, the long-lost vigour of their former youth. Once more, he experienced the infirmities of his age; once more he remembered the miseries that had made his existence one unending martyrdom; once more he felt the presence of his ambition within him, like a judgment that he was doomed to welcome, like a curse that he was created to cherish. To say that his sensations at this moment were those of the culprit who hears the order for his execution when he had been assured of a reprieve, is to convey but a faint idea of the fierce emotions of rage, grief, and despair, that now united to rend the Pagan's heart.

Trembling with weariness, he flung himself down under the shade of some bushes that clothed for some distance the base of the wall above him. As he lay there—so still in his heavy lassitude that life itself seemed to have left him—one of the long green lizards, common to Italy, crawled over his shoulder. He seized the animal—doubtful for the moment whether it might not be of the poisonous species—and examined it. At the first glance he discovered that it was of the harmless order of its race, and would have flung it carelessly from him, but for something in its appearance which, in the wayward irritability of his present mood, he felt a strange and sudden pleasure in contemplating.

Through its exquisitely marked and transparent skin he could perceive the action of the creature's heart, and saw that it was beating violently, in the agony of fear caused to the animal by its imprisonment in his hand. As he looked on it, and thought how continually a being so timid must be thwarted in its humble anxieties, in its small efforts, in its little journies from one patch of grass to another,

by a hundred obstacles, which, trifles though they might be to animals of a higher species, were yet of fatal importance to creatures constituted like itself, he began to find an imperfect, yet remarkable, analogy between his own destiny and that of this small unit of creation. He felt that, in its petty sphere, the short life of the humble animal before him must have been the prey of crosses and disappointments, as serious to it, as the more severe and destructive afflictions of which *he*, in *his* existence, had been the victim; and, as he watched the shadow-like movement of the little fluttering heart of the lizard, he experienced a cruel pleasure in perceiving that there were other beings in the creation, even down to the most insignificant, who inherited a part of *his* misery, and suffered a portion of *his* despair.

Ere long, however, his emotions took a sterner and a darker hue. The sight of the animal wearied him, and he flung it contemptuously aside. It disappeared in the direction of the ramparts; and almost at the same moment he heard a slight sound, resembling the falling of several minute particles of

brick or light stone, which seemed to come from the wall behind him.

That such a noise should proceed from so massive a structure appeared unaccountable. He rose, and, parting the bushes before him, advanced close to the surface of the lofty wall. To his astonishment, he found that the brickwork had in many places so completely mouldered away, that he could move it easily with his fingers. The cause of the trifling noise that he had heard was now fully explained: hundreds of lizards had made their homes between the fissures of the bricks; the animal that he had permitted to escape had taken refuge in one of these cavities, and in the hurry of its flight had detached several of the loose crumbling fragments that surrounded its hiding-place.

Not content, however, with the discovery he had already made, he retired a little, and, looking steadfastly up through some trees which in this particular place grew at the foot of the wall, he saw that its surface was pierced in many places by great irregular rifts, some of which extended nearly to its whole height. In addition to this, he perceived

that the mass of the structure at this particular point, leaned considerably out of the perpendicular. Astounded at what he beheld, he took a stick from the ground, and inserting it in one of the lowest and smallest of the cracks, easily succeeded in forcing it entirely into the wall, part of which seemed to be hollow, and part composed of the same rotten brickwork which had at first attracted his attention.

It was now evident that the whole structure, over a breadth of several yards, had been either weakly and carelessly built, or had at some former period suffered a sudden and violent shock. He left the stick in the wall to mark the place : and was about to retire, when he heard the footstep of the sentinel on the rampart immediately above. Suddenly cautious, though from what motive he would have been at that moment hardly able to explain, he remained in the concealment of the trees and bushes, until the guard had passed onward ; then he cautiously emerged from the place ; and, retiring to some distance, fell into a train of earnest and absorbing thought.

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To account to the reader for the phenomenon which now engrossed the Pagan's attention, it will be necessary to make a brief digression to the history of the walls of Rome.

The circumference of the first fortifications of the city, built by Romulus, was thirteen miles. The greater part, however, of this large area was occupied by fields and gardens, which it was the object of the founder of the empire to preserve for arable purposes, from the incursions of the different enemies by whom he was threatened from without. As Rome gradually increased in size, its walls were progressively enlarged and altered by subsequent rulers. But it was not until the reign of the Emperor Aurelian (A.D. 270), that any extraordinary or important change was effected in the defences of the city. That potentate commenced the erection of walls, twenty-one miles in circumference, which were finally completed in the reign of Probus, (A.D. 276), were restored by Belisarius (A.D. 537), and are to be seen in detached portions, in the fortifications of the modern city, to the present day.

At the date of our story, then, (A.D. 408) the walls remained precisely as they had been constructed in the reigns of Aurelian and Probus. They were for the most part made of brick ; and in a few places, probably, a sort of soft sandstone might have been added to the pervading material. At several points in their circumference, and particularly in the part behind the Pincian Hill, these walls were built in arches, forming deep recesses, and occasionally disposed in double rows. The method of building employed in their erection, was generally that mentioned by Vitruvius, in whose time it originated, as “opus reticulatum.”

The “opus reticulatum” was composed of small bricks (or stones) set together on their angles, instead of horizontally, and giving the surface of a wall the appearance of a sort of solid net-work. This was considered by some architects of antiquity a perishable mode of construction ; and Vitruvius asserts that some buildings where he had seen it used, had fallen down. From the imperfect specimens of it which remain in modern times, it would be difficult to decide upon its merits. That it was

assuredly insufficient to support the weight of the bank of Pincian Mount, which rose immediately behind it, in the solitary spot described some pages back, is still made evident by the appearance of the wall at that part of the city, which remains in modern times bent out of the perpendicular, and cracked in some places almost from top to bottom. This ruin is now known to the present race of Italians, under the expressive title of “Il Muro Torto,” or, The Crooked Wall.

We may here observe that it is extremely improbable that the existence of this natural breach in the fortifications of Rome was noticed, or if noticed, regarded with the slightest anxiety or attention by the majority of the careless and indolent inhabitants, at the period of the present romance. It is supposed to have been visible as early as the time of Aurelian, but is only particularly mentioned by Procopius, an historian of the sixth century, who relates that Belisarius, in strengthening the city against a siege of the Goths, attempted to repair this weak point in the wall, but was hindered in his intended labour by the devout

populace, who declared that it was under the peculiar protection of St. Peter, and that it would be consequently impious to meddle with it. The general submitted to the decision of the inhabitants, and without finding cause to repent of his facility of compliance; for, to use the translated words of the writer above-mentioned, “During the siege neither the enemy nor the Romans regarded this place.” It is to be supposed that so extraordinary an event as this, gave the wall that sacred character, which deterred subsequent rulers from attempting its repair; which permitted it to remain crooked and rent through the convulsions of the middle ages; and which still preserves it, to attest the veracity of historians, by appealing to the antiquarian curiosity of the traveller of modern times.*

* * * *

We now return to Ulpus. It is a peculiarity observable in the characters of men living under the ascendancy of one ruling idea, that they intuitively distort whatever attracts their attention in the outer world, into a connection more or less inti-

* See note in Appendix—“The Rift in the Wall.”

mate with the single object of their mental contemplation. Since the time when he had been exiled from the Temple, the Pagan's conceptions had, unconsciously to himself, acted solely in reference to the daring design which it was the business of his whole existence to entertain. Influenced, therefore, by this obliquity of moral feeling, he had scarcely reflected on the discovery that he had just made at the base of the city wall, ere his mind instantly reverted to the ambitious meditations which had occupied it in the morning; and the next moment, the first dawning conceptions of a bold and perilous project began to absorb his restless and impassioned thoughts.

He reflected on the peculiarities and position of the wall before him. Although the widest and most important of the rents which he had observed in it, existed too near the rampart to be reached without the assistance of a ladder, there were others as low as the ground, which he knew, by the result of the trial he had already made, might be successfully and immensely widened by the most ordinary exertion and perseverance. The interior

of the wall, if judged by the condition of the surface, could offer no insuperable obstacles to an attempt at penetration so partial as to be limited to a height and width of a few feet. The ramparts, from their position between two guard-houses, would be unencumbered by an inquisitive populace. The sentinel, within the limits of whose allotted watch it happened to fall, would, when night came on, be the only human being likely to pass the spot; and at such an hour his attention must necessarily be fixed—in the circumstances under which the city was now placed—on the prospect beyond, rather than on the ground below and behind him. It appeared, therefore, almost a matter of certainty, that a cautious man, labouring under cover of the night, might pursue whatever investigations he pleased at the base of the wall.

He examined the ground where he now stood. Nothing could be more lonely than its present aspect. The private gardens on the hill above it shut out all communication from that quarter. It could only be approached by the foot-path that ran round the Pincian Mount, and along the base

of the walls. In the state of affairs now existing in the city, it was not probable that any one would seek this solitary place, whence nothing could be seen, and little heard, in preference to mixing with the spirit-stirring confusion in the streets, or observing the Gothic encampment from such positions on the ramparts as were easily attainable to all. In addition to the secrecy offered by the loneliness of this insignificant patch of ground to whatever employments were undertaken on it, was the further advantage afforded by the trees and thickets which covered its lower end, and which would effectually screen an intruder, during the darkness of night, from the most penetrating observation directed from the wall above.

Reflecting thus, he doubted not that a cunning and determined man, might with impunity so far widen any one of the inferior breaches in the lower part of the wall, as to make a cavity (large enough to admit a human figure) that should pierce to its outer surface, and afford that liberty of departing from the city and penetrating the Gothic camp, which the closed gates now denied to all the in-

habitants alike. To discover the practicability of such an attempt as this, was, to a mind filled with such aspirations as the Pagan's, to determine irrevocably on its immediate execution. He resolved as soon as night approached to begin his labours on the wall; to seek—if the breach were made good, and the darkness favoured him—the tent of Alaric; and once arrived there, to acquaint him with the weakness of the materials for defence within the city, and betray to him the dilapidated condition of the fortifications below the Pincian Mount, insisting, as the condition of his treachery, on an assurance from the Goth (which he doubted not would be gladly and instantly accorded) of the destruction of the Christian churches, the pillage of the Christian possessions, and the massacre of the Christian priests.

He retired cautiously from the lonely place that had now become the centre of his new hopes; and entering the streets of the city, proceeded to provide himself with an instrument that would facilitate his approaching labours, and food that would give him strength to prosecute his intended efforts,

unthreatened by the hindrance of fatigue. As he thought on the daring treachery of his project, his morning's exultation began to return to him again. All his previous attempts to organise the restoration of his worship, sunk into sudden insignificance before his present design. His defence of the Temple of Serapis, his conspiracy at Alexandria, his intrigue with Vetricio, were the efforts of a man; but this projected destruction of the priests, the churches, and the treasures of a whole city, through the agency of a mighty army, moved by the unaided machinations of a single individual, would be the dazzling achievement of a god!

The hours loitered slowly onward. The sun waned in the gorgeous heaven, and set, surrounded by red and murky clouds. Then came silence and darkness. The Gothic watch-fires flamed one by one into the dusky air. The guards were doubled at the different posts. The populace were driven from the ramparts, and the fortifications of the great city echoed to no sound now, but the tramp of the restless sentinel, or the clash of arms from the distant

guard-houses that dotted the long line of the lofty walls.

It was then that Ulpus, passing cautiously along the least-frequented streets, gained unnoticed the place of his destination. A thick vapour lay over the lonely and marshy spot. Nothing was now visible from it but the dim uncertain outline of the palaces above, and the mass, so sunk in obscurity that it looked like a dark layer of mist itself, of the rifted fortifications. A smile of exultation passed over the Pagan's countenance as he perceived the shrouding and welcome thickness of the atmosphere. Groping his way softly through the thickets, he arrived at the base of the wall. For some time he passed slowly along it, feeling the width of the different rents wherever he could stretch his hand. At length he paused at one more extensive than the rest, drew from its concealment in his garments a thick bar of iron sharpened at one end, and began to labour at the breach.

Chance had led him to the place best adapted to his purpose. The ground he stood on was

only encumbered close to the wall by rank weeds and low thickets, and was principally composed of damp, soft turf. The bricks, therefore, as he carefully detached them, made no greater noise in falling, than the slight rustling caused by their sudden contact with the boughs through which they descended. Insignificant as this sound was, it aroused the apprehension of the wary Pagan. He laid down his iron bar, and removed the thickets by dragging them up, or breaking them at the roots, until he had cleared a space of some feet in extent before the base of the wall. He then returned to his toilsome task, and with hands bleeding from the wounds inflicted by the thorns he had grasped in removing the thickets, continued his labour at the brick-work. He pursued his employment with perfect impunity; the darkness covered him from observation; no one disturbed him by approaching the solitary scene of his operations; and of the two sentinels who were placed near the part of the wall which was the centre of all his exertions, one remained motionless at the most distant extremity of his post, and

the other paced restlessly backwards and forwards on the rampart, singing a wild, rambling song about war, and women, and wine, which, whatever liberty it might allow to his organs of perception, effectually hindered the vigilant exercise of his faculties of hearing.

Brick after brick yielded to the vigorous and well-timed efforts of Ulpus. He had already made a cavity, in an oblique direction, large enough to creep through, and was preparing to penetrate still further, when a portion of the rotten material of the interior of the wall suddenly yielded in a mass to a chance pressure of his iron bar, and slowly sunk down inwards into a bed which, judging by such faint sounds as were audible at the moment, must have been partly water, and partly marshy earth and rotten brick-work. After having first listened, to be sure that the slight noise caused by this event had not reached the ears or excited the suspicions of the careless sentinels, Ulpus crept into the cavity he had made, groping his way with his bar, until he reached the brink of a chasm, the depth of

which he could not probe, and the breadth of which he could not ascertain.

He lingered irresolute ; the darkness around him was impenetrable ; he could feel toads and noisome animals crawling over his limbs. The damp atmosphere of the place began to thrill through him to his very bones ; his whole frame trembled under the excess of his past exertions. Without light, he could neither attempt to advance, nor hope to discover the size and extent of the chasm which he had partially laid open. Time moved inexorably onward : it was necessary to arrive at a resolution ere it would be too late.

He crept out of the cavity. Just as he had gained the open air the sentinel halted over the very spot where he stood, and paused suddenly in his song. There was an instant's interval of silence, during which the inmost soul of the Pagan quailed beneath an apprehension as vivid, as that which had throbbed in the heart of the despised lizard, whose flight had guided him to his discovery at the wall. Soon, however, he heard the voice of the soldier calling cheerfully to his fellow sentinel, " Comrade, do you

see the moon? She is rising to cheer our watch!"

Nothing had been discovered!—he was still safe! But if he stayed at the cavity till the mists faded before the moonlight, could he be certain of preserving his security? He felt that he could not!

What mattered a night more or a night less, to such a project as his? Months might elapse before the Goths retired from the walls. It was better to suffer delay than to risk discovery. He determined to leave the place, and to return on the following night provided with a lantern, the light of which he would conceal until he entered the cavity. Once there, it could not be perceived by the sentinels above—it would guide him through all obstacles, preserve him through all dangers. Massive as it was, he felt convinced that the interior of the wall was in as ruinous a condition as the outside. Caution and perseverance were all that would be necessary, to insure to his efforts the speediest and completest success.

He waited until the sentinel had again betaken himself to the furthest limits of his watch, and

then softly gathering up the brushwood that lay round him, he concealed with it the mouth of the cavity in the outer wall, and the fragments of brick-work that had fallen on the turf beneath. 'This done, he again listened, to assure himself that he had been unobserved ; then, stepping with the utmost caution, he departed by the path that led round the slope of the Pincian Hill.

“ Strength—patience—and to-morrow night ! ” muttered the Pagan to himself, as he entered the streets, and congregated once more with the citizens of Rome.

CHAPTER IV.



GOISVINTHA'S RETURN.

IT was morning. The sun had risen, but his beams were partially obscured by thick heavy clouds, which scowled already over the struggling brightness of the eastern horizon. The bustle and animation of the new day gradually overspread the Gothic encampment in all directions. The only tent whose curtain remained still closed, and round which no busy crowds congregated in discussion or mingled in labour, was that of Hermanric. By the dying embers of his watchfire stood the young chieftain, with two warriors to whom he appeared to be giving some hurried directions. His countenance expressed emotions of anxiety and discontent, which, though partially repressed while he was in the presence of his companions, became

thoroughly visible, not only in his features, but in his manner, when they left him standing alone before his tent.

For some time he walked regularly backwards and forwards, looking anxiously down the westward lines of encampment, and occasionally whispering to himself a hasty exclamation of doubt and impatience. The light of the new morning had been fast dissipating the delighting meditations, which had occupied him by his watchfire during the darkness of the night. And now, as the hour of her expected return gradually approached, the image of Goisvintha banished from his mind whatever remained of those peaceful and happy contemplations in which he had hitherto been absorbed. The more he thought on his fatal promise—on the nation of Antonina—on his duties to the army and the people to whom he belonged, the more doubtful appeared to him his chance of permanently protecting the young Roman without risking his degradation as a Goth, and his ruin as a warrior; and the more sternly and ominously rang in his ears the unassailable truth of Goisvintha's parting

taunt—"You *must* remember your promise, you cannot save her if you would!"

Wearied of persisting in deliberations which only deepened his melancholy and increased his doubts, and bent on sinking in a temporary and delusive oblivion the boding reflections that overcame him in spite of himself, by seeking—while its enjoyment was yet left to him—the society of his ill-fated charge, he approached his tent, drew aside the thick, heavy curtain of skins which closed its opening, and bent over the rude couch on which Antonina was still sleeping.

A ray of sunlight, fitful and struggling, burst at this moment through the heavy clouds, and stole into the opening of the tent as he contemplated the slumbering girl. It ran its flowing course up her uncovered hand and arm, flew over her bosom and neck, and bathed in a bright fresh glow, her still and reposing features. Gradually her limbs began to move, her lips parted gently and half smiled, as if in welcome to the greeting of the light; her eyes slightly opened, then dazzled by the brightness that flowed through their raised lids,

tremblingly closed again. At length thoroughly awakened, she shaded her face with her hands, and sitting up on the couch, met the gaze of Hermanric fixed on her in ardent and sorrowful examination.

“Your bright armour, and your glorious name, and your merciful words, have remained with me even in my sleep,” said she, wonderingly; “and now, when I awake, I see you before me again! It is a happiness to be aroused by the sun which has gladdened me all my life, to look upon *you* who have given me shelter in my distress! But why,” she continued, in altered and enquiring tones, “why do you look upon me with doubting and mournful eyes?”

“You have slept well and safely,” said Hermanric, evasively, “I closed the opening of the tent to preserve you from the night-damps, but I have raised it now, for the air is warming under the rising sun—”

“Are you wearied with watching?” she interrupted, rising to her feet, and looking anxiously into his face. But he gave her no answer. His

head was turned towards the door of the tent. He seemed to be listening for some expected sound. It was evident that he had not heard her question. She followed the direction of his eyes. The sight of the great city, half brightened, half darkened, as its myriad buildings reflected the light of the sun, or retained the shadows of the clouds, brought back to her remembrance her last night's petition for her father's safety. She laid her hand upon her companion's arm to awaken his attention, and hastily resumed:—

“You have not forgotten what I said to you last night? My father's name is Numerian. He lives on the Pincian Mount. You will save him, Hermanric—you will save him! You will remember your promise!”

The young warrior's eyes fell as she spoke, and an irrepressible shudder shook his whole frame. The last part of Antonina's address to him, was expressed in the same terms as a past appeal from other lips, and in other accents, which still clung to his memory. The same demand, “*Remember your promise,*” which had been advanced to urge him to

bloodshed, by Goisvintha in the evening, was now proffered by Antonina, to lure him to pity. The petition of affection was concluded in the same terms as the petition of revenge. As he thought on both, the human pity of the one, and the fiend-like cruelty of the other, rose in sinister and significant contrast on the mind of the Goth, realising in all its perils the struggle that was to come when Goisvintha returned, and dispelling instantaneously the last hopes that he had yet ventured to cherish for the fugitive at his side.

“No assault of the city is commanded—no assault is intended. Your father’s life is safe from the swords of the Goths,” he gloomily replied, in answer to Antonina’s last words.

The girl removed her gaze from his countenance as he spoke, and looked abstractedly round the tent. The battle-axe that Hermanric had secured during the scene of the past evening, still lay on the ground, in a corner. The sight of it brought back a flood of terrible recollections to her mind. She started violently ; a sudden change overspread her features, and as she again addressed Hermanric

her lips trembled, so that she could scarcely form her words.

“ I know now why you look on me so gloomily,” said she ; “ that woman is coming back ! I was so occupied by my dreams and my thoughts of my father and of you, and my hopes for days to come, that I had forgotten her when I awoke ! But I remember all now ! She is coming back—I see it in your sorrowful eyes—she is coming back to murder me ! I shall die at the moment when I had such hope in my life ! There is no happiness for me ! None !—none ! ”

The Goth's countenance began to darken. He whispered to himself several times, “ How can I save her ? ” For a few minutes there was a deep silence, broken only by the sobs of Antonina. He looked round at her after an interval. She held her hands clasped over her eyes. The tears were streaming through her parted fingers ; her bosom heaved as if her emotions would burst their way through it in some palpable form ; and her limbs trembled so, that she could scarcely support herself. Unconsciously, as he looked on her, he passed his

arm round her slender form, drew her hands gently from her face, and said to her, though his heart belied his words as he spoke, "Do not be afraid—trust in me!"

"How can I be calm?" she cried, looking up at him entreatingly, "I was so happy last night, so sure that you could preserve me, so hopeful about to-morrow—and now I see by your mournful looks, I know by your doubting voice, that to soothe my anguish you have promised me more than you can perform! The woman who is your companion, has a power over us both that it is terrible even to think of! She will return, she will withdraw all mercy from your heart, she will glare upon me with her fearful eyes, she will kill me at your feet! I shall die after all I have suffered and all I have hoped! Oh Hermanric, while there is yet time let us escape! *You* were not made to shed blood—*you* are too merciful! God never made you to destroy! You cannot yearn towards cruelty and woe, for you have aided and protected *me*! Let us escape! I will follow you wherever you wish! I will do whatever you ask! I will go with you

beyond those far, bright mountains behind us, to any strange and distant land ; for there is beauty everywhere ; there are woods that may be dwelt in, and valleys that may be loved, on all the surface of this wide, great earth ! Think how many pleasures we should enjoy, how much we might see ! We should be free to wander wherever we pleased ; we should never be lonely ; never be mournful ; never be wearied ! I could listen to you day after day, while you told me of the country where your people were born ! I could sing you sweet songs that I have learned upon the lute ! Oh, how I have wept in my loneliness to lead such a life as this ! How I have longed that such freedom and joy might be mine ! How I have thought of the distant lands that I would visit, of the happy nations that I would discover, of the mountain breezes that I would breathe, of the shady places that I would repose in, of the rivers that I would follow in their course, of the flowers I would plant, and the fruits I would gather ! How I have hoped for such an existence as this ! How I have longed for a companion who might enjoy it as I should !

Have you never felt this joy that I have imagined to myself, you who have been free to wander wherever you pleased? Let us leave this place, and I will teach it to you if you have not. I will be so patient, so obedient, so happy! I will never be sorrowful; never repining—but let us escape—Oh, Hermanric, let us escape while there is yet time! Will you keep me here to be slain? Can you drive me forth into the world alone? Remember that the gates of the city and the doors of my home are now closed to me! Remember that I have no mother, and that my father has forsaken me! Remember that I am a stranger on the earth which was made for me to be joyful in! Think how soon the woman who has vowed that she will murder me will return; think how terrible it is to be in the fear of death; and while there is time let us depart—Hermanric, Hermanric, if you have pity for me let us depart!”

She clasped her hands, and looked up in his face imploringly. The manner of Hermanric had expressed more to her senses, sharpened as they were by peril, than his words could have

conveyed, even had he confessed to her the cause of the emotions of doubt and apprehension that oppressed his mind. Nothing could more strikingly testify to the innocence of her character and the seclusion of her life, than her attempt to combine with her escape from Goisvintha's fury, the acquisition of such a companion as the Goth. But to the forlorn and affectionate girl who saw herself—a stranger to the laws of the social existence of her fellow creatures—suddenly thrust forth friendless into the unfriendly world, could the heart have naturally prompted any other desire, than anxiety to secure the companion after having discovered the protector? In the guilelessness of her character, in her absolute ignorance of humanity, of the influence of custom, of the adaptation of difference of feeling to difference of sex, she vainly imagined that the tranquil existence she had urged on Hermanric, would suffice for the attainment of her end, by presenting the same allurements to him, a warrior and a Goth, that it contained for her—a lonely, thoughtful, visionary girl! And yet, so wonderful was

the ascendancy that she had acquired by the magic of her presence, the freshness of her beauty, and the novelty of her manners, over the heart of the young chieftain, that he, who would have spurned from him with contempt any other woman who might have addressed to him such a petition as Antonina's, looked down sorrowfully at the girl as she ceased speaking, and for an instant hesitated in his choice.

At that moment, when the attention of each was fixed on the other, a third person stealthily approached the opening of the tent, and beholding them together thus, burst into a bitter taunting laugh. Hermanric raised his eyes instantly; but the sound of that harsh unwomanly voice was all-eloquent to Antonina's senses. She hid her face against the Goth's breast, and murmured breathlessly—"She has returned! I must die! I must die!"

She *had* returned! She perceived Hermanric and Antonina in a position, which left no doubt that a stronger feeling than the mere wish to protect the victim of her intended revenge, had

arisen, during her absence, in the heart of her kinsman. Hour after hour, while she had fulfilled her duties by the beds of Alaric's invalided soldiery, had she brooded over her projects of vengeance and blood. Neither the sickness nor the death which she had beheld around her, had possessed an influence powerful enough over the stubborn ferocity which now alone animated her nature, to lure it to mercy or awe it to repentance. Invigorated by delay, and enlarged by disappointment, the evil passion that consumed her had strengthened its power, and aroused the most latent of its energies, during the silent vigil that she had just held. She had detested the girl, on the evening before, for her nation ; she now hated her for herself.

“ What have *you* to do with the trappings of a Gothic warrior ? ” she cried, in mocking accents, pointing at Hermanric with a long hunting-knife which she held in her hand. “ Why are *you* here in a Gothic encampment ? Go, knock at the gates of Rome, implore her guards on your knees to admit you among the citizens, and when they ask

you why—show them the girl there! Tell them that you love her, that you would wed her, that it is nothing to *you* that her people have murdered your brother and his children! And then, when you yourself have begotten sons, Gothic bastards infected with Roman blood, be a Roman at heart yourself, send your children forth to complete what your wife's people left undone at Aquileia—by murdering *me*!”

She paused and laughed scornfully. Then her humour suddenly changed, she advanced a few steps, and continued in a louder and sterner tone:—

“You have broken your faith; you have lied to me; you have forgotten *your* wrongs and *mine*; but you have not yet forgotten my parting words when I left you last night! I told you that she should be slain; and now that you have refused to avenge me, I will make good my words by killing her with my own hand! If you would defend *her*, you must murder *me*. You must shed *her* blood or *mine*!”

She stepped forward, her towering form was

stretched to its highest stature, the muscles started into action on her bare arms as she raised them above her head. For one instant, she fixed her glaring eyes steadily on the girl's shrinking form—the next, she rushed up and struck furiously with the knife at her bare neck. As the weapon descended, Hermanric caught her wrist. She struggled violently to disengage herself from his grasp, but in vain.

The countenance of the young warrior grew deadly pale, as he held her. For a few minutes he glanced eagerly round the tent, in an agony of bewilderment and despair. The conflicting interests of his duty towards his brother's wife, and his anxiety for Antonina's preservation, filled his heart to distraction. A moment more he hesitated, and during that short delay, the despotism of custom had yet power enough to prevail over the promptings of pity. He called to the girl—withdrawing his arm which had hitherto been her support,—“Go, have mercy on me, go!”

But she neither heeded nor heard him. She fell

on her knees at the woman's feet, and in a low moaning voice faltered out :—

“ What have I done that I deserve to be slain ?
I never murdered your children ; I never yet saw a child but I loved it ; if I had seen *your* children, I should have loved *them* ! ”

“ If I had preserved, to this time, the child that I saved from the massacre, and you had approached him,” returned the woman fiercely, “ I would have taught him to strike at you with his little hands ! When you spoke to him, he should have spat upon you for answer—even thus ! ”

Trembling, exhausted, terrified as she was, the girl's Roman blood rushed over her pale cheeks as she felt the insult. She turned towards Hermanric, looked up at him appealingly, attempted to speak, and then sinking lower upon the ground wept bitterly.

“ Why do you weep and pray and mouth it at *him* ? ” shrieked Goisvintha, pointing to Hermanric with her disengaged hand, “ He has neither courage to protect *you*, nor honour to aid *me*. Do you think that *I* am to be moved by your tears and

entreaties? I tell you that your people have slain my husband and my children, and that I hate you for that. I tell you that you have lured Hermanric into love for a Roman and unfaithfulness to me, and I will slay you for doing it! I tell you that there is not a living thing of the blood of your country, or the name of your nation, throughout the length and breadth of this empire, that I would not destroy if I had the power! If the very trees on the road hither could have had feeling, I would have torn the bark from their stems with my own hands! If a bird, native of your skies, had flown into my bosom from very tameness and sport, I would have crushed it dead at my feet! And do you think that *you* shall escape? Do you think that I will not avenge the deaths of my husband and my children upon *you*, after this?"

As she spoke, she mechanically unclenched her hands. The knife dropped to the ground. Hermanric instantly stooped and secured it. For a moment she stood before him released from his grasp, motionless and speechless. Then, starting as if struck by a sudden idea, she moved towards

the opening of the tent ; and, in tones of malignant triumph, addressed him thus :

“ You shall not save her yet ! You are unworthy of your nation and your name ! I will betray your cowardice and treachery to your brethren in the camp ! ” And she ran to the outside of the tent, calling in a loud voice to a group of young warriors who happened to be passing at a short distance. “ Stay ! stay ! Fritigern—Athanaric—Colias—Suerid—Witheric—Fravitta ! Hasten hitherward ! Hermanric has a captive in his tent—a prisoner whom it will rejoice you to see ! Hitherward, hitherward ! ”

The group she addressed contained some of the most turbulent and careless spirits of the whole Gothic army. They had just been released from their duties of the past night, and were at leisure to comply with Goisvintha’s request. She had scarcely concluded her address, before they turned and hurried eagerly up to the tent, shouting to Hermanric, as they advanced, to make his prisoner visible to them in the open air.

They had probably expected to be regaled by

the ludicrous terror of some Roman slave whom their comrade had discovered lurking in the empty suburbs ; for when they entered the tent, and saw nothing but the shrinking figure of the unhappy girl, as she crouched on the earth at Hermanric's feet, they all paused with one accord, and looked round on each other in speechless astonishment.

“ Behold her ! ” cried Goisvintha, breaking the momentary silence. “ She is the Roman prisoner that your man of valour there has secured for himself ! For that trembling child he has forgotten the enmities of his people ! She is more to him already than army, general, or companions. *You* have watched before the city during the night ; but *he* has stood sentinel by the maiden of Rome ! Hope not that he will share in your toils, or mix in your pleasures more. Alaric and the warriors have lost his services—his future king cringes there at his feet ! ”

She had expected to arouse the anger and excite the jealousy of the rough audience she addressed : but the result of her envenomed jeers disappointed her hopes. The humour of the moment prompted the Goths to ridicule, a course infinitely more ini-

mical to Antonina's interests with Hermanric, than menaces or recrimination. Recovered from their first astonishment, they burst into a loud and universal laugh.

“Mars and Venus caught together! But, by St. Peter, I see not Vulcan and the net!” cried Fravitta, who having served in the armies of Rome, and acquired a vague knowledge there of the ancient mythology, and the modern politics of the Empire, was considered by his companions as the wit of the battalion to which he was attached.

“I like her figure,” growled Fritigern, a heavy, phlegmatic giant, renowned for his imperturbable good humour, and his prowess in drinking. “What little there is of it looks so limp, that Hermanric might pack her into his light baggage, and carry her about with him on his shoulders wherever he goes!”

“By which process you would say, old sucker of wine-skins, that he will attain the double advantage of always keeping her to himself, and always keeping her warm,” interrupted Colias, a ruddy reckless boy of sixteen, privileged to be impertinent in consideration of his years.

“Is she Orthodox or Arian?” gravely demanded Athanaric, who piqued himself on his theological accomplishments and his extraordinary piety.

“What hair she has!” exclaimed Suerid, sarcastically. “It is as black as the horse-hides of a squadron of Huns!”

“Show us her face! Whose tent will she visit next?” cried Witheric, with an insolent laugh.

“Mine!” replied Fritigern complacently. “What says the chorus of the song?

‘ Money and wine
Make beauty mine !’

I have more of both than any of you. She will come to *my* tent !”

During the delivery of these clumsy jests, which followed one upon another with instantaneous rapidity, the scorn at first expressed in Hermanric’s countenance became gradually replaced by a look of irrepressible anger. As Fritigern spoke, he lost all command over himself, and seizing his sword, advanced threateningly towards the easy-tempered giant, who made no attempt to recede or defend

himself, but called out soothingly, "Patience, man, patience! Would you kill an old comrade for jesting? I envy you your good luck as a friend, not as an enemy!"

Yielding to the necessity of lowering his sword before a defenceless man, Hermanric was about to reply angrily to Fritigern, when his voice was drowned in the blast of a trumpet, sounding close by the tent. The signal that it gave was understood at once by the group of jesters still surrounding the young Goth. They turned, and retired without an instant's delay. The last of their number had scarcely disappeared, when the same veteran who had spoken with Hermanric on the departure of Goisvintha the evening before, entered and thus addressed him:—

"You are commanded to post yourself with the division that now awaits you, at a place eastward of your present position, which will be shown you by a guide. Make ready at once—you have not an instant to delay."

As the words passed the old man's lips, Hermanric turned and looked on Goisvintha. During

the presence of the Goths in the tent, she had sat listening to their rough jeers in suppressed wrath and speechless disdain ; now she rose and advanced a few steps. But there suddenly appeared an unwonted hesitation in her gait ; her face was pale ; she breathed fast and heavily. “Where will you shelter her now ?” she cried, addressing Hermanric, and threatening the girl with her outstretched hands. “Abandon her to your companions, or leave her to me ; she is lost either way ! I shall triumph—triumph !”——

At this moment her voice sank to an unintelligible murmur ; she tottered where she stood. It was evident that the long strife of passions during her past night of watching, and the fierce and varying emotions of the morning, suddenly brought to a crisis, as they had been, by her exultation when she heard the old warrior’s fatal message, had at length over-tasked the energies even of *her* powerful frame. Yet one moment more she endeavoured to advance, to speak, to snatch the hunting-knife from Hermanric’s hand ; the next she fell insensible on the earth at his feet.

Goaded almost to madness by the successive trials that he had undergone ; Goisvintha's furious determination to thwart him, still present to his mind ; the scornful words of his companions yet ringing in his ears ; his inexorable duties demanding his attention without reserve or delay ; Hermanric succumbed at last under the difficulties of his position, and despairingly abandoned all further hope of effecting the girl's preservation. Pointing to some food that lay in a corner of the tent, and to the country behind, he said to her, in broken and gloomy accents, " Furnish yourself with those provisions, and fly, while Goisvintha is yet unable to pursue you. I can protect you no longer ! "

Until this moment, Antonina had kept her face hidden, and had remained still crouching on the ground ; motionless, save when a shudder ran through her frame as she listened to the loud, coarse jesting of the Goths ; and speechless, except that when Goisvintha sank senseless to the earth, she uttered an exclamation of terror. But now, when she heard the sentence of her banishment proclaimed by the very lips which but the evening before had assured

her of shelter and protection, she rose up instantly, cast on the young Goth a glance of such speechless misery and despair, that he involuntarily quailed before it ; and then, without a tear or a sigh, without a look of reproach, or a word of entreaty, petrified and bowed down beneath a perfect trance of terror and grief, she left the tent.

Hurrying his actions with the reckless energy of a man determined on banishing his thoughts by his employments, Hermanric placed himself at the head of his troop, and marched quickly onwards in an eastward direction past the Pincian Gate. Two of his attendants who happened to enter the tent after his departure, observing Goisvintha still extended on the earth, proceeded to transport her to the part of the camp occupied by the women who were attached to the army ; and then, the little sheltering canopy which made the abode of the Goth, and which had witnessed so large a share of human misery and so fierce a war of human contention in so few hours, was left as silent and lonely as the deserted country in which Antonina was now fated to seek a refuge and a home.

CHAPTER V.



THE PASSAGE OF THE WALL.

“A FAIR night this, Balbus ! All moonlight and no mist ! I was posted last evening at the Ostian Gate, and was half choked by the fog.”

“If you were posted last night at the Ostian Gate, you were better placed than you are now. The ramparts here are as lonely as a ruin in the provinces. Nothing behind us but the back of the Pincian Mount ; nothing before us but the empty suburbs ; nothing at each side of us but brick and stone ; nothing at our posts but ourselves. May I be crucified like St. Peter, if I believe that there is another place on the whole round of the walls possessed of such solitary dulness as this !”

“You are a man to find something to complain of, if you were lodged in one of the palaces yonder.

The place is solitary enough, it is true ; but whether it is dull or not depends on ourselves, its most honourable occupants. I, for one, am determined to promote its joviality by the very praiseworthy exertion of obliging you, my discontented friend, with an inexhaustible series of those stories for which, I may say without arrogance, I am celebrated throughout the length and breadth of all the barracks of Rome."

"You may tell as many stories as you please, but do not imagine that I will make one of your audience."

"You are welcome to attend to me or not, as you choose. Though you do not listen, I shall still relate my stories by way of practice. I will address them to the walls, or to the air, or to the defunct gods and goddesses of antiquity, should they happen at this moment to be hovering over the city in a rage, as some of the unconverted would have us believe; or to our neighbours the Goths, if they are seized with a sudden desire to quit their encampments, and obtain a near view of the fortifications that they are so discreetly unwilling

to assault. Or, these materials for a fit and decent auditory failing me, I will tell my stories to the most attentive of all listeners—myself.”

And the sentinel, without further delay, opened his budget of anecdotes, with the easy fluency of a man who possessed a well-placed confidence in the perfection of his capacities for narration. Determined that his saturnine comrade should hear him, though he would not give him his attention, he talked in a raised voice, pacing briskly backwards and forwards over the space of his allotted limits, and laughing with ludicrous regularity and complacency, at every jest that he happened to make in the course of his ill-rewarded narrative. He little thought, as he continued to proceed in his tale, that its commencement had been welcomed by an unseen hearer, with emotions widely different from those which had dictated the observations of the unfriendly companion of his watch.

True to his determination, Ulpius, with part of the wages which he had hoarded in Numerian's service, had procured a small lantern from a shop in one of the distant quarters of Rome; and veiling

its light in a piece of coarse, thick cloth, had proceeded by the solitary pathway to his second night's labour at the wall. He arrived at the breach, at the commencement of the dialogue above related, and heard with delight the sentinel's noisy resolution to amuse his companion in spite of himself; for the louder and the longer the man talked, the less probable was the chance that his labours in the interior of the wall would be suspected or overheard.

He softly cleared away the brushwood at the entrance of the hole that he had made the night before; crept in as far as he had penetrated on that occasion; and then, with mingled emotions of expectation and apprehension which affected him so powerfully, that he was for the moment hardly master of his actions, he slowly and cautiously uncovered his light.

His first glance was intuitively directed to the cavity that opened beneath him. He saw immediately that it was less important, both in size and depth, than he had imagined it to be. The earth at this particular place had given way beneath the

foundations of the wall, which had sunk down, deepening the chasm by their weight, into the yielding ground beneath them. A small spring of water, (probably the first cause of the sinking in the earth) had bubbled up into the space in the brick-work, which, bit by bit, and year by year, it had gradually undermined. Nor did it remain stagnant at this place. It trickled merrily and quietly onward—a tiny rivulet, emancipated from one prison in the ground only to enter another in the wall, bounded by no grassy banks, brightened by no cheerful light, admired by no human eye, followed in its small course through the inner fissures in the brick by no living thing but a bloated toad, or a solitary lizard; yet wending as happily on its way through darkness and ruin, as its sisters who were basking in the sunlight of the meadow, or leaping in the fresh breezes of the open mountain side.

Raising his eyes from the little spring, Ulpus next directed his attention to the prospect above him.

Although, immediately over his head the material of the interior of the wall presented a smooth,

flat, hard surface, which seemed capable of resisting the most vigorous attempts at its destruction, on looking round, he perceived at one side of him and further inwards, an appearance of dark, dimly-defined irregularity, which promised encouragingly for his intended efforts. He descended into the chasm of the rivulet, crawled up on a heap of crumbling brickwork, and gained a hole above it, which he immediately began to widen, to admit of his passage through. Inch by inch, he enlarged the rift, crept into it, and found himself on a fragment of the bow of one of the foundation arches, which though partly destroyed, still supported itself, isolated from all connection with the part of the upper wall which it had once sustained, and which had gradually crumbled away into the cavities below.

He looked up. An immense rift soared above him, stretching its tortuous ramifications, at different points, into every part of the wall that was immediately visible. The whole structure seemed, at this place, to have received a sudden and tremendous wrench. But for the support of the

sounder fortifications at each side of it, it could not have sustained itself after the shock. The Pagan gazed aloft, into the fearful breaches which yawned above him, with ungovernable awe. His small, fitful light, was not sufficient to show him any of their terminations. They looked, as he beheld them in dark relief against the rest of the hollow part of the wall, like mighty serpents twining their desolating path right upward to the ramparts above; and he, himself, as he crouched on his pinnacle with his little light by his side, was reduced by the wild grandeur, the vast, solemn gloom of the obscure, dusky, and fantastic objects around him, to the stature of a pigmy. Could he have been seen from the ramparts high overhead, as he now peered down behind his lantern into the cavities and irregularities below him, he would have looked, with his flickering light, like a mole led by a glow-worm.

He paused to consider his next movements. In a stationary position, the damp coldness of the atmosphere was almost insupportable, but he attained a great advantage by his present stillness :

could listen undisturbed by the noises made by the bricks which crumbled from under him, if he advanced.

Ere long, he heard a thin, winding, long-drawn sound, now louder, now softer; now approaching, now retreating; now verging towards shrillness, now quickly returning to a faint, gentle swell. Suddenly this strange unearthly music was interrupted by a succession of long, deep, rolling sounds, which travelled grandly about the fissures above, like prisoned thunderbolts striving to escape. Utterly ignorant that the first of these noises was occasioned by the night-wind winding through the rents in the brick of the outer wall beyond him; and the second, by the echoes produced in the irregular cavities above, by the footfall of the sentries overhead—roused by the influence of the place, and the mystery of his employment, to a pitch of fanatic exaltation, which for the moment absolutely unsteadied his reason—filled with the frantic enthusiasm of his designs, and the fearful legends of invisible beings and worlds which made the foundation of his worship, Ulpian conceived, as he listened to the sounds

around and above, that the gods of antiquity were now, in viewless congregation hovering about him, and calling to him in unearthly voices and in an unknown tongue, to proceed upon his daring enterprise, in the full assurance of its near and glorious success.

“Roar and mutter, and make your hurricane music in my ears!” exclaimed the Pagan, raising his withered hands, and addressing in a savage ecstasy his imagined deities. “Your servant Ulpus stops not on the journey that leads him to your repeopled shrines! Blood, crime, danger, pain—pride and honour, joy and rest, have I strewn like sacrifices at your altars’ feet! Time has whirled past me; youth and manhood have lain long since buried in the hidden Lethe which is the portion of life; age has wreathed his coils over my body’s strength, but still I watch by your temples and serve your mighty cause! Your vengeance is near! Monarchs of the world, your triumph is at hand!”

He remained for some time in the same position, looking fixedly up into the trackless darkness

above him, drinking in the sounds which -- alternately rising and sinking--still floated round him. The trembling gleam of his lantern fell red and wild upon his livid countenance. His shaggy hair floated in the cold breezes that blew by him. At this moment he would have appeared from a distance, like a phantom of fire perishing in a mist of darkness; like a Gnome in adoration in the bowels of the earth; like a forsaken spirit in a solitary purgatory, watching for the advent of a glimpse of beauty, or a breath of air.

At length he aroused himself from his trance, trimmed with careful hand his guiding lantern, and set forward to penetrate the breadth of the great rift he had just entered.

He moved on in an oblique direction several feet, now creeping over the tops of the foundation arches, now skirting the extremities of protrusions in the ruined brickwork, now descending into dark slimy rubbish-choked chasms, until the rift suddenly diminished in all directions.

The atmosphere was warmer in the place he now occupied, he could faintly distinguish patches of

damp, dark moss, dotted here and there over the uneven surface of the wall ; and once or twice, some blades of long flat grass, that grew from a prominence immediately above his head, were waved in his face by the wind, which he could now feel blowing through the narrow fissure that he was preparing to enlarge. It was evident that he had by this time advanced to within a few feet of the outer extremity of the wall.

“Numerian wanders after his child through the streets,” muttered the Pagan, as he deposited his lantern by his side, bared his trembling arms, and raised his iron bar, “the slaves of his neighbour the senator are forth to pursue me. On all sides my enemies are out after me ; but, posted here, I mock their strictest search ! If they would track me to my hiding-place, they must penetrate the walls of Rome ! If they would hunt me down in my lair, they must assail me to-night in the camp of the Goths ! Fools ! let them look to themselves ! I seal the doom of their city, with the last brick that I tear from their defenceless walls ! ”

He laughed to himself as he thrust his bar

boldly into the crevice before him. In some places the bricks yielded easily to his efforts ; in others, their resistance was only to be overcome by the exertion of his utmost strength. Resolutely and unceasingly he continued his labours ; now wounding his hands against the jagged surfaces presented by the widening fissure ; now involuntarily dropping his instrument from ungovernable exhaustion ; but, still working bravely on, in defiance of every hindrance that opposed him, until he gained the interior of the new rift.

As he drew his lantern after him into the cavity that he had made, he perceived that, unless it was heightened immediately over him, he could proceed no further, even in a creeping position. Irritated at this unexpected necessity for more violent exertion, desperate in his determination to get through the wall at all hazards, on that very night, he recklessly struck his bar upwards with all his strength, instead of gradually and softly loosening the material of the surface that opposed him, as he had done before.

A few moments of this labour had scarcely

elapsed, when a considerable portion of the brickwork, consolidated into one firm mass, fell with lightning suddenness from above. It hurled him under it, prostrate on the foundation arch which had been his support, crushed and dislocated his right shoulder, and shivered his lantern into fragments. A groan of irrepressible anguish burst from his lips. He was left in impenetrable darkness.

The mass of brickwork, after it had struck him, rolled a little to one side. By a desperate exertion he extricated himself from under it—only to swoon from the fresh anguish caused to him by the effort.

For a short time he lay insensible in his cold dark solitude. Then, reviving after this first shock, he began to experience in all their severity, the fierce spasms, the dull gnawings, the throbbing torments, that were the miserable consequences of the injury he had received. His arm lay motionless by his side—he had neither strength nor resolution to move any one of the other sound limbs in his body. At one moment, his deep,

sobbing, stifled respirations, syllabled horrible and half-formed curses—at another, his panting breaths suddenly died away within him; and then he could hear the blood dripping slowly from his shoulder, with dismal regularity, into a little pool that it had formed already by his side.

The shrill breezes which wound through the crevices in the wall before him, were now felt only on his wounded limb. They touched its surface like innumerable splinters of thin, sharp ice; they penetrated his flesh like rushing sparks struck out of a sea of molten lead. There were moments, during the first pangs of this agony, when if he had been possessed of a weapon and of the strength to use it, he would have sacrificed his ambition for ever by depriving himself of life.

But this desire to end his torments with his existence lasted not long. Gradually, the anguish in his body awakened a wilder and stronger distemper in his mind, and then the two agonies, physical and mental, rioted over him together in fierce rivalry, divesting him of all thoughts but such as were by their own agency created or aroused.

For some time he lay helpless in his misery, alternately venting by stifled groans the unalleviated torment of his wounds, and lamenting with curses the failure of his enterprise, at the very moment of its apparent success. At length, the pangs that struck through him seemed to grow gradually less frequent; he hardly knew now from what part of his frame they more immediately proceeded. Insensibly, his faculties of thinking and feeling grew blunted; then he remained a little while in a mysterious unrefreshing repose of body and mind, and then his disordered senses, left unguided and unrestrained, became the victims of a sudden and terrible delusion.

The blank darkness around him appeared, after an interval, to be gradually dawning into a dull light, thick and misty, like the reflections on clouds which threaten a thunderstorm at the close of evening. Soon, this atmosphere seemed to be crossed and streaked with a fantastic trellis-work of white, seething vapour. Then the mass of brickwork which had struck him down, grew apparent at his side, enlarged to an enormous bulk,

and endued with a power of self-motion, by which it mysteriously swelled and shrank, and raised and depressed itself, without quitting for a moment its position near him. Erelong, from its dark and toiling surface there rose a long stream of dusky shapes, which twined themselves about the misty trellis-work above, and took the prominent and palpable form of human countenances, marked by every difference of age and distorted by every variety of suffering.

There were infantine faces, wreathed about with grave-worms that hung round them like locks of filthy hair; aged faces, dabbled with gore and slashed with wounds; youthful faces, seamed with livid channels, along which ran unceasing tears; lovely faces, distorted into fixed expressions of raging pain, wild malignity, and despairing gloom. Not one of these countenances exactly resembled the other. Each was distinguished by a revolting character of its own. Yet, however deformed might be their other features, the eyes of all were preserved unimpaired. Speechless and bodiless, they floated in unceasing myriads up to the

fantastic trellis-work, which seemed to swell its wild proportions to receive them. There they clustered, in their goblin amphitheatre, and fixedly and silently they all glared down, without one exception, on the Pagan's face !

Meanwhile the walls at the side began to gleam out with a light of their own, making jagged boundaries to the midway scene of phantom faces. Then the rifts in their surfaces widened, and disgorged mishapen figures of Pagan idols and Pagan priests, which came forth in every hideous deformity of aspect, mocking at the faces on the trellis-work ; while behind and over the whole, soared shapes of gigantic darkness, robed in grim cloudy resemblances of skins such as were worn by the Goths, and wielding through the quivering vapour, mighty and shadow-like weapons of war. From the whole of this ghastly assemblage there rose not the slightest sound. A stillness, as of a dead and ruined world, possessed in all its quarters the appalling scene. The deep echoes of the sentries' footsteps and the faint dirging of the melancholy winds were no more. The blood that had

as yet dripped from his wound, made no sound now in the Pagan's ear; even his own agony of terror was as silent as were the visionary demons who had aroused it. Days, years, centuries, seemed to pass, as he lay gazing up, in a trance of horror, into his realm of peopled and ghostly darkness. At last nature yielded under the trial; the phantom prospect suddenly whirled round him with fearful velocity, and his senses sought refuge from the thralldom of their own creation in a deep and welcome swoon.

Time had moved wearily onward, the chiding winds had many times waved the dry locks of his hair to and fro about his brow, as if to bid him awaken and arise, ere he again recovered his consciousness. Once more aroused to the knowledge of his position and the sensation of his wound, he slowly raised himself upon his uninjured arm, and looked wildly around for the faintest appearance of a gleam of light. But the winding and uneven nature of the track which he had formed to lead him through the wall, effectually prevented the moonbeams, then floating into the outermost of the

cavities that he had made, from reaching the place where he now lay. Not a single object was even faintly distinguishable around him. Darkness hemmed him in, in rayless and triumphant obscurity, on every side.

The first agonies of the injury he had received had now resolved themselves into one dull, heavy, unchanging sensation of pain. The vision that had overwhelmed his senses was now, in a vast and shadowy form, present only to his memory, filling the darkness with fearful recollections, and not with dismal forms ; and urging on him a restless, head-long yearning to effect his escape from the lonely and unhallowed sepulchre, the prison of solitude and death, that his own fatal exertions threatened him with, should he linger much longer in the caverns of the wall.

“I must pass from this darkness into light—I must breathe the air of the sky, or I shall perish in the damps of this vault,” he exclaimed in a hoarse, moaning voice, as he raised himself gradually and painfully into a creeping position ; and turning round slowly, commenced his meditated retreat.

His brain still whirled with the emotions that had so lately overwhelmed his mind ; his right hand hung helplessly by his side, dragged after him like a prisoner's chain, and lacerated by the uneven surfaces of the ground over which it was slowly drawn, as—supporting himself on his left arm, and creeping forward a few inches at a time—he set forth on his toilsome journey.

Here, he paused bewildered in the darkness ; there, he either checked himself by a convulsive effort from falling headlong into the unknown deeps beneath him, or lost the little ground he had gained in labour and agony, by retracing his way at the bidding of some unexpected obstacle. Now he gnashed his teeth in anguish, now he cursed in despair, now he was breathless with exhaustion ; but still, with an obstinacy that had in it something of the heroic, he never failed in his fierce resolution to effect his escape.

Slowly and painfully, moving with the pace and the perseverance of the tortoise, hopeless yet determined as a navigator in a strange sea, he writhed onward and onward upon his unguided course,

until he reaped at length the reward of his long suffering, by the sudden discovery of a thin ray of pale dim light toiling through a crevice in the murky brickwork before him. Hardly did the hearts of the Magi when the vision of "the star in the east" first dawned on their eyes, leap within them with a more vivid transport, than that which animated the heart of Ulpian at the moment when he beheld the inspiring and guiding light.

Yet a little more exertion, a little more patience, a little more anguish ; and he stood once again, a ghastly and crippled figure, before the outer cavity in the wall.

The day had begun to break ; the moon was waning coldly in the dull, grey heaven ; a small, vaporous rain was sinking from the shapeless clouds ; morning showed bleak and cheerless to the earth, but cast no mournful or reproving influence over the Pagan's mind. He looked round on his solitary lurking place, and beheld no human figure in its lonely recesses. He looked up at the ramparts, and saw that the sentinels stood silent and apart, wrapped in their heavy watch-cloaks, and

supported on their trusty weapons. It was perfectly apparent that the events of his night of suffering and despair had passed unheeded by the outer world.

He glanced back with a shudder upon his wounded and helpless limb; then his eyes fixed themselves upon the wall. After surveying it with an earnest and defiant gaze, he slowly moved the brushwood with his foot, against the small cavity in its outer surface.

“Days pass, wounds heal, chances change.” muttered the old man, departing from his haunt with slow and uncertain steps. “In the mines I have borne lashes without a murmur—I have felt my chains widening, with each succeeding day, the ulcers that their teeth of iron first gnawed in my flesh, and have yet lived to loosen my fetters, and to close my sores! Shall this new agony have a power to conquer me greater than the others that are past? I will even yet return in time to overcome the resistance of the wall! My arm is crushed, but my purpose is whole!”

CHAPTER VI.



THE HOUSE IN THE SUBURBS.

RETRACING some hours, we turn from the rifted wall to the suburbs and the country which its ramparts overlook ; abandoning the footsteps of the maimed and darkly-plotting Ulpius, our attention now fixes itself on the fortunes of Hermanric, and the fate of Antonina.

Although the evening had as yet scarcely closed, the Goth had allotted to the warriors under his command their different stations for the night in the lonely suburbs of the city. This duty performed, he was left to the unbroken solitude of the deserted tenement which now served him as a temporary abode.

The house he occupied was the last of the wide and irregular street in which it stood ; it looked

towards the wall beneath the Pincian Mount, from which it was separated by a public garden about half a mile in extent. This once well-thronged place of recreation was now totally unoccupied. Its dull groves were brightened by no human forms; the chambers of its gay summer houses were dark and desolate; the booths of its fruit and flower sellers stood vacant on its untrodden lawns. Melancholy and forsaken, it stretched forth as a fertile solitude under the very walls of a crowded city.

And yet there was a charm inexpressibly solemn and soothing in the prospect of loneliness that it presented, as its flower-beds and trees were now gradually obscured to the eye in the shadows of the advancing night. It gained in its present refinement what it had lost in its former gaiety; it had its own simple attraction still, though it failed to sparkle to the eye with its accustomed illuminations, or to please the ear by the music and laughter, which rose from it in times of peace. As he looked forth over the view from the terrace of his new abode, the remembrance of the employments

of his past and busy hours deserted the memory of the young Goth, leaving his faculties free to welcome the reflections which night began insensibly to awaken and create.

Employed under such auspices, whither would the thoughts of Hermanric naturally stray?

From the moonlight that already began to ripple over the topmost trembling leaves of the trees beyond him, to the delicate and shadowy flowers that twined up the pillars of the deserted terrace where he now stood, every object that he beheld connected itself, to his vivid and uncultured imagination, with the one being of whom all that was beautiful in nature, seemed to him the eloquent and befitting type. He thought of Antonina whom he had once protected; of Antonina whom he had afterwards abandoned; of Antonina whom he had now lost!

Strong in the imaginative and weak in the reasoning faculties; gifted with large moral perception and little moral firmness; too easy to be influenced and too difficult to be resolved, Hermanric had deserted the girl's interests from an

infirmity of disposition, rather than from a resolution of will. Now, therefore, when the employments of the day had ceased to absorb his attention ; now when silence and solitude led his memory back to his morning's abandonment of his helpless charge, that act of fatal impatience and irresolution inspired him with the strongest emotions of sorrow and remorse. If during her sojourn under his care, Antonina had insensibly influenced his heart, her image, now that he reflected on his guilty share in their parting scene, filled all his thoughts, at once saddening and shaming him, as he remembered her banishment from the shelter of his tent.

Every feeling which had animated his reflections on Antonina on the previous night, was doubled in intensity as he thought on her now. Again he recalled her eloquent words, and remembered the charm of her gentle and innocent manner ; again he dwelt on the beauties of her outward form. Each warm expression ; each varying intonation of voice that had accompanied her petition to him for safety and companionship ; every persuasion that she had used to melt him, now revived in his memory and

moved in his heart with steady influence and increasing power. All the hurried and imperfect pictures of happiness that she had drawn to allure him, now expanded and brightened, until his mind began to figure to him visions that had been hitherto unknown to faculties occupied by no other images than those of rivalry, turbulence, and strife. Scenes called into being by Antonina's lightest and hastiest expressions, now rose vague and shadowy before his brooding spirit. Lovely places of earth that he had visited and forgotten, now returned to his recollection, idealised and refined as he thought of her. She appeared to his mind in every allurements of action, fulfilling all the duties and enjoying all the pleasures that she had proposed to him. He imagined her happy and healthful, journeying gaily by his side in the fresh morning, with rosy cheek and elastic step; he imagined her delighting him by her promised songs, enlivening him by her eloquent words, in the mellow stillness of evening; he imagined her sleeping, soft and warm and still, in his protecting arms—ever happy and ever gentle; girl in years, and woman in capa-

cities ; at once lover and companion, teacher and pupil, follower and guide !

Such she might have been once ! What was she now ?

Was she sinking under her loneliness, perishing from exposure and fatigue, threatened by the treacherous, repulsed by the cruel, or mocked by the unthinking ? To all these perils and miseries had he exposed her ; and to what end ? To maintain the uncertain favour, to preserve the unwelcome friendship, of a woman abandoned even by the most common and intuitive virtues of her sex ; whose frantic craving for revenge, confounded justice with treachery, innocence with guilt, helplessness with tyranny ; whose claims of nation and relationship should have been forfeited in his estimation, by the openly-confessed malignity of her designs, at the fatal moment when she had communicated them to him in all their atrocity, before the walls of Rome. He groaned in despair, as he thought on this, the most unworthy of the necessities, to which the forsaken girl had been sacrificed.

Soon, however, his thoughts turned from such

reflections as these, to his own duties and his own renown; and here his remorse became partially lightened, though his sorrow remained unchanged.

Wonderful as had been the influence of Antonina's presence, and Antonina's words over the Goth, they had not yet acquired power enough to smother in him entirely the warlike instincts of his sex and nation, or to vanquish the strong and hostile promptings of education and custom. She had gifted him with new emotions, and awakened him to new thoughts; she had aroused all the dormant gentleness of his disposition to war against the rugged indifference, the reckless energy, that teaching and example had hitherto made a second nature to his heart. She had wound her way into his mind, brightening its dark places, enlarging its narrow recesses, beautifying its unpolished treasures. She had created, she had refined, during her short hours of communication with him, but she had not lured his disposition entirely from its old habits and its old attachments; she had not yet stripped off the false glitter from barbarian

strife, or the pomp from martial renown ; she had not elevated the inferior intellectual, to the height of the superior moral faculties, in his inward composition. Submitted almost impartially to the alternate and conflicting dominion of the two masters, Love and Duty, he at once regretted Antonina, and yet clung mechanically to his old obedience to those tyrannic requirements of nation and name, which had occasioned her loss.

Oppressed by his varying emotions, destitute alike of consolation and advice, the very inaction of his present position sensibly depressed him. He rose impatiently, and buckling on his weapons, sought to escape from his thoughts, by abandoning the scene under the influence of which they had been first aroused. Turning his back upon the city, he directed his steps at random, through the complicated labyrinth of streets, composing the extent of the deserted suburbs.

After he had passed through the dwellings comprised in the occupation of the Gothic lines, and had gained those situated nearer to the desolate country beyond, the scene around him became

impressive enough to have absorbed the attention of any man not wholly occupied by other and more important objects of contemplation.

The loneliness he now beheld on all sides, was not the loneliness of ruin—the buildings near him were in perfect repair ; it was not the loneliness of pestilence—there were no corpses strewn over the untrodden pavements of the streets ; it was not the loneliness of seclusion—there were no barred windows, and few closed doors ; it was a solitude of human annihilation. The open halls of the theatres were untenanted ; the porticos of the churches were unapproached ; the benches before the wine-shops were unoccupied ; remains of gaudy household wares still stood on the counters of the street booths, watched by none, bought by none ; particles of bread and meat (treasures, fated to become soon of greater value than silver and gold, to beleaguered Rome) rotted here in the open air, like garbage upon dunghills ; children's toys, women's ornaments, purses, money, love-tokens, precious manuscripts, lay scattered hither and thither in the public ways, dropped and abandoned by their

different owners, in the hurry of their sudden and universal flight. Every deserted street was eloquent of darling projects desperately resigned, of valued labours miserably deserted, of delighting enjoyments irretrievably lost. The place was forsaken even by those household gods of rich and poor, its domestic animals. They had either followed their owners into the city, or strayed, unhindered and unwatched, into the country beyond. Mansion, bath, and circus, displayed their gaudy pomp and luxurious comfort in vain; not even a wandering Goth was to be seen near their empty halls. For, with such a prospect before them as the subjugation of Rome, the army had caught the infection of its leader's enthusiasm for his exalted task, and willingly obeyed his commands for suspending the pillage of the suburbs, disdaining the comparatively worthless treasures around them, attainable at any time, when they felt that the rich coffers of Rome herself were now fast opening to their eager hands. Voiceless and noiseless, unpeopled and unravaged, lay the far-famed suburbs of the greatest city of the universe,

sunk alike in the night of Nature, the night of Fortune, and the night of Glory !

Saddening and impressive as was the prospect thus presented to the eyes of the young Goth, it failed to weaken the powerful influence that his evening's meditations yet held over his mind. As, during the hours that were passed, the image of the forsaken girl had dissipated the remembrance of the duties he had performed, and opposed the contemplation of the commands he was yet to fulfil, so it now denied to his faculties any impressions from the lonely scene, beheld, yet unnoticed, which spread around him. Still, as he passed through the gloomy streets, his vain regrets and self-accusations, his natural predilections and acquired attachments, ruled over him and contended within him, as sternly and as unceasingly as in the first moments when they had arisen with the evening, during his sojourn in the terrace of the deserted house.

He had now arrived at the extremest boundary of the buildings in the suburbs. Before him lay an uninterrupted prospect of smooth, shining fields,

and soft, hazy, indefinable woods. At one side of him were some vineyards and cottage gardens ; at the other was a solitary house, the outermost of all the abodes in his immediate vicinity. Dark and cheerless as it was, he regarded it for some time with the mechanical attention of a man more occupied in thought than observation,—gradually approaching it in the moody abstraction of his reflections, until he unconsciously paused before the low range of irregular steps which led to its entrance door.

Startled from his meditations by his sudden propinquity to the object that he had unconsciously approached, he now, for the first time, examined the lonely abode before him with real attention.

There was nothing remarkable about the house, save the extreme desolateness of its aspect, which appeared to arise partly from its isolated position, and partly from the unusual absence of all decoration on its external front. It was too extensive to have been the dwelling of a poor man, too void of pomp and ornament to have been a mansion of the rich. It might, perhaps, have belonged to some

citizen of the middle class—perhaps to some moody Northman, some solitary Egyptian, some scheming Jew. Yet, though it was not possessed, in itself, of any remarkable or decided character, the Goth experienced a mysterious, almost an eager curiosity to examine its interior. He could assign no cause, discover no excuse for the act, as he slowly mounted the steps before him. Some invisible and incomprehensible magnet attracted him to the dwelling. If his return had been suddenly commanded by Alaric himself; if evidences of indubitable treachery had lurked about the solitary place, at the moment when he thrust open its unbarred door, he felt that he must still have proceeded upon his onward course.

The next instant he entered the house. The light streamed through the open entrance into the gloomy hall; the night-wind, rushing upon its track, blew shrill and dreary among the stone pillars, and in the hidden crevices and untenanted chambers above. Not a sign of life appeared, not a sound of a footstep was audible, not even an article of household use was to be seen. The

deserted suburbs rose without, like a wilderness ; and this empty house looked within, like a sepulchre —void of corpses, and yet eloquent of death !

There was an inexplicable fascination to the eyes of the Goth about this vault-like, solitary hall. He stood motionless at its entrance, gazing dreamily into the gloomy and vacant prospect before him, until a strong gust of wind suddenly forced the outward door further backwards, and at the same moment admitted a larger stream of light.

The place was not empty. In a corner of the hall, hitherto sunk in darkness, crouched a shadowy form. It was enveloped in a dark garment, and huddled up into an indefinable and unfamiliar shape. Nothing appeared on it, as a denoting sign of humanity, but one pale hand, holding the black drapery together, and relieved against it in almost ghastly contrast under the cold light of the moon.

Vague remembrances of the awful superstitions of his nation's ancient worship, hurried over the memory of the young Goth, at the first moment of his discovery of the ghost-like occupant of the hall. As he stood in fixed attention before the

motionless figure, it soon began to be endowed with the same strange influence over his will, that the lonely house had already exerted. He advanced slowly towards the crouching form.

It never stirred at the noise of his approach. The pale hand still held the mantle over the compressed figure, with the same rigid immobility of grasp. Brave as he was, Hermanric shuddered as he bent down and touched the bloodless, icy fingers. At that action, as if endowed with instant vitality from contact with a living being, the figure suddenly started up.

Then, the folds of the dark mantle fell back, disclosing a face as pale in hue as the stone pillars around it; and the voice of the solitary being became audible, uttering in faint, monotonous accents, these words:—

“He has forgotten and abandoned me!—slay me if you will!—I am ready to die!”

Broken, untuned as it was, there yet lurked in that voice a tone of its old music, there beamed in that vacant and heavy eye a ray of its native gentleness. With a sudden exclamation of compassion

and surprise, the Goth stepped forward, raised the trembling outcast in his arms; and, in the impulse of the moment quitting the solitary house, stood the next instant on the firm earth, and under the starry sky, once more united to the charge that he had abandoned—to Antonina whom he had lost.

He spoke to her, caressed her, entreated her pardon, assured her of his future care; but she neither answered nor recognised him. She never looked in his face, never moved in his arms, never petitioned for mercy. She gave no sign of life or being, saving that she moaned at regular intervals in piteous accents:—"He has forgotten and abandoned me!" as if that one expression comprised for her at once, her acknowledgment of the uselessness of her life, and her dirge for her expected death.

The Goth's countenance whitened to his very lips. He began to fear that her faculties had sunk under her trials. He hurried on with her, with trembling and uncertain steps, towards the open country; for he nourished a dreamy, intuitive hope, that the sight of those woods and fields and moun-

tains which she had extolled to him, in her morning's entreaty for protection, might restore her suspended consciousness, if she now looked on them.

He ran forward, until he had left the suburbs at least half a mile behind him, and had reached an eminence, bounded on each side by high grass banks and clustering woods, and commanding a narrow, yet various prospect, of the valley ground beneath, and the fertile plains that extended beyond.

Here the warrior paused with his burden ; and, seating himself on the bank, once more attempted to calm the girl's continued bewilderment and terror. He thought not on his sentinels, whom he had abandoned—on his absence from the suburbs, which might be perceived and punished by an unexpected visit, at his deserted quarters, from his superiors in the camp. The social influence that sways the world ; the fragile idol at whose shrine pride learns to bow, and insensibility to feel ; the soft, grateful influence of yielding nature yet eternal rule—the influence of woman, source alike of virtues and crimes, of earthly glories and earthly disasters—had, in this moment of anguish and

expectation, silenced in him every appeal of duty, and overthrown every obstacle of selfish doubt. He now spoke to Antonina as alluringly as a woman, as gently as a child. He caressed her as warmly as a lover, as cheerfully as a brother, as kindly as a father. He—the rough, northern warrior, whose education had been of arms, and whose youthful aspirations had been taught to point towards strife and bloodshed and glory—even he was now endowed with the tender eloquence of pity and love—with minute, skilful care—with calm, enduring patience !

Gently and unceasingly he plied his soothing task ; and soon, to his joy and triumph, he beheld the approaching reward of his efforts, in the slow changes that became gradually perceptible in the girl's face and manner. She raised herself in his arms, looked up fixedly and vacantly into his face, then round upon the bright, quiet landscape, then back again more stedfastly upon her companion ; and at length, trembling violently, she whispered softly and several times the young Goth's name, glancing at him anxiously and apprehensively,

as if she feared and doubted while she recognised him.

“You are bearing me to my death,”—said she suddenly. “*You*, who once protected me—*you*, who forsook me!—You are luring me into the power of the woman who thirsts for my blood!—Oh, it is horrible—horrible!”

She paused, averted her face, and shuddering violently, disengaged herself from his arms. After an interval, she continued :—

“Through the long day, and in the beginning of the cold night, I have waited in one solitary place for the death that is in store for me! I have suffered all the loneliness of my hours of expectation, without complaint; I have listened with little dread, and no grief, for the approach of my enemy who has sworn that she will shed my blood! Having none to love me, and being a stranger in the land of my own nation, I have nothing to live for! But it is a bitter misery to me to behold in *you* the fulfiller of my doom: to be snatched by the hand of Hermanric from the heritage of life that I have so long struggled to preserve!”

Her voice had altered, as she pronounced these words, to an impressive lowness and mournfulness of tone. Its quiet, saddened accents were expressive of an almost divine resignation and sorrow; they seemed to be attuned to a mysterious and untraceable harmony with the melancholy stillness of the night-landscape. As she now stood gazing up with pale, calm countenance, and gentle, tearless eyes, into the sky whose moonlight brightness shone softly over her form, the Virgin watching the approach of her angel messenger could hardly have been adorned with a more pure and simple loveliness, than now dwelt over the features of Numerian's forsaken child.

No longer master of his agitation; filled with awe, grief, and despair, as he looked on the victim of his heartless impatience; Hermanric bowed himself at the girl's feet, and, in the passionate utterance of real remorse, offered up his supplications for pardon and his assurances of protection and love. All that the reader has already learned—the bitter self-upbraidings of his evening, the sorrowful wanderings of his night, the mysterious

attraction that had led him to the solitary house, his joy at once more discovering his lost charge—all these confessions he now poured forth in the unadorned and powerful eloquence of strong emotion and true regret.

Gradually and amazedly, as she listened to his words, Antonina awoke from her abstraction. The expression of his countenance and the earnestness of his manner, viewed by the intuitive penetration of her sex and her position, wrought with kind and healing influence on her mind. She started suddenly, a bright flush flew over her colourless cheeks; she bent down, and looked earnestly and wistfully into the Goth's face. Her lips moved, but her quick convulsive breathing stifled the words that she vainly endeavoured to form.

“Yes,” continued Hermanric, rising and drawing her towards him again, “you shall never mourn, never fear, never weep more! Though you have lost your father, and the people of your nation are as strangers to you, though you have been threatened and forsaken, you shall still be beautiful—still be happy; for I will watch you, and

you shall never be harmed ; I will labour for you, and you shall never want ! People and kindred—fame and duty, I will abandon them all to make atonement to *you* ! ”

Its youthful freshness and hope returned to the girl's heart, as water to the long-parched spring, when the young warrior ceased. The tears stood in her eyes, but she neither sighed nor spoke. Her frame trembled all over with the excess of her astonishment and delight, as she still stedfastly looked on him and still listened intently as he proceeded :—

“ Fear, then, no longer for your safety—Goisvintha, whom you dread, is far from us ; she knows not that we are here ; she cannot track our footsteps now, to threaten or to harm you ! Remember no more how *you* have suffered and *I* have sinned ! Think only how bitterly I have repented our morning's separation, and how gladly I welcome our meeting of to-night ! Oh, Antonina ! you are beautiful with a wondrous loveliness, you are young with a perfected and unchildlike youth, your words fall upon my ear with the music of a

song of the olden time; it is like a dream of the spirits that my fathers worshipped, when I look up and behold you at my side!"

An expression of mingled confusion, pleasure, and surprise, flushed the girl's half-averted countenance as she listened to the Goth. She rose with a smile of ineffable gratitude and delight, and pointed to the prospect beyond, as she softly rejoined:—

"Let us go a little further onward, where the moonlight shines over the meadow below. My heart is bursting in this shadowy place! Let us seek the light that is yonder; it seems happy like me!"

They walked forward; and as they went, she told him again of the sorrows of her past day; of her lonely and despairing progress from his tent to the solitary house where he had found her in the night, and where she had resigned herself from the first to meet a death that had little horror for her then. There was no thought of reproach, no feeling of complaint, in this renewal of her melancholy narration. It was solely that she might luxuriate afresh in those delighting expressions of repentance

and devotion, which she knew that it would call forth from the lips of Hermanric, that she now thought of addressing him once more with the tale of her grief.

As they still went onward; as she listened to the rude fervent eloquence of the language of the Goth; as she looked on the stillness of the landscape, and the soft transparency of the night sky; her mind, ever elastic under the shock of the most violent emotions, ever ready to regain its wonted healthfulness and hope—now recovered its old tone, and re-assumed its accustomed balance. Again her memory began to store itself with its beloved remembrances, and her heart to rejoice in its artless longings and visionary thoughts. In spite of all her fears and all her sufferings, she now walked on blest in a disposition that woe had no shadow to darken long, and neglect no influence to warp; still as happy in herself; even yet as forgetful of her past, as hopeful for her future, as on that first evening when we beheld her in her father's garden singing to the music of her lute.

Insensibly as they had proceeded, they had

diverged from the road, had entered a bye-path, and now stood before a gate which led to a small farm house, surrounded by its gardens and vineyards, and, like the suburbs that they had quitted, deserted by its inhabitants on the approach of the Goths. They passed through the gate, and arriving at the plot of ground in front of the house, paused for a moment to look around them.

The meadows had been already stripped of their grass, and the young trees of their branches, by the foragers of the invading army, but here the destruction of the little property had been stayed. The house with its neat thatched roof and shutters of variegated wood, the garden with its small stock of fruit and its carefully tended beds of rare flowers, designed probably to grace the feast of a nobleman or the statue of a martyr, had presented no allurements to the rough tastes of Alaric's soldiery. Not a mark of a footstep appeared on the turf before the house door; the ivy crept in its wonted luxuriance about the pillars of the lowly porch; and as Hermanric and Antonina walked towards the fish-pond at the extremity of the garden, the few water-

fowl placed there by the owners of the cottage, came swimming towards the bank, as if to welcome in their solitude the appearance of a human form.

Far from being melancholy, there was something soothing and attractive about the loneliness of the deserted farm. Its ravaged outhouses and plundered meadows, which might have appeared desolate by day, were so distanced, softened, and obscured, by the atmosphere of night, that they jarred not with the prevailing smoothness and luxuriance of the landscape around. As Antonina beheld the brightened fields and the shadowed woods, here mingled, there succeeding each other, stretched far onward and onward until they joined the distant mountains, that eloquent voice of nature, whose audience is the human heart, and whose theme is eternal love, spoke inspiringly to her attentive senses. She stretched out her arms as she looked with steady and enraptured gaze upon the bright view before her, as if she longed to see its beauties resolved into a single and living form—into a spirit human enough to be addressed, and visible enough to be adored.

“ Beautiful earth ! ” she murmured softly to herself. “ Thy mountains are the watch-towers of angels, thy moonlight is the shadow of God ! ”

Her eyes filled with bright, happy tears ; she turned to Hermanric, who stood watching her, and continued :—

“ Have you never thought that light, and air, and the perfume of flowers, might contain some relics of the beauties of Eden that escaped with Eve, when she wandered into the lonely world ? *They* glowed and breathed for *her*, and *she* lived and was beautiful in *them* ! They were united to one another, as the sunbeam is united to the earth that it warms ; and could the sword of the cherubim have sundered them at once ? When Eve went forth, did the closed gates shut back in the empty Paradise, *all* the beauty that had clung, and grown, and shone round her ! Did no ray of her native light steal forth after her into the desolateness of the world ? Did no print of her lost flowers remain on the bosom they must once have pressed ? It cannot be ! A part of her possessions of Eden must have been spared to her with a part of her

life. She must have refined the void air of the earth when she entered it, with a breath of the fragrant breezes, and a gleam of the truant sunshine of her lost Paradise ! They must have strengthened and brightened, and must now be strengthening and brightening with the slow lapse of mortal years, until, in the time when earth itself will be an Eden, they shall be made one again with the hidden world of perfection, from which they are yet separated. So that, even now, as I look forth over the landscape, the light that I behold has in it a glow of Paradise, and this flower that I gather a breath of the fragrance that once stole over the senses of my first mother, Eve ! ”

Though she paused here, as if in expectation of an answer, the Goth preserved an unbroken silence. Neither by nature nor position was he capable of partaking the wild fancies and aspiring thoughts, drawn by the influences of the external world from their concealment in Antonina's heart.

The mystery of his present situation ; his vague remembrances of the duties he had abandoned ; the uncertainty of his future fortunes and future

fate ; the presence of the lonely being so inseparably connected with his past emotions and his existence to come, so strangely attractive by her sex, her age, her person, her misfortunes, and her endowments ; all contributed to bewilder his faculties. Goisvintha, the army, the besieged city, the abandoned suburbs, seemed to hem him in like a circle of shadowy and threatening judgments ; and in the midst of them stood the young denizen of Rome, with her eloquent countenance and her inspiring words, ready to hurry him, he knew not whither, and able to influence him, he felt not how.

Unconsciously interpreting her companion's silence into a wish to change the scene and the discourse, Antonina, after lingering over the view from the garden for a moment longer, led the way back towards the untenanted house. They removed the wooden padlock from the door of the dwelling, and guided by the brilliant moonlight, entered its principal apartment.

The homely adornments of the little room had remained undisturbed, and dimly distinguishable though they now were, gave it to the eyes of the

two strangers, the same aspect of humble comfort which had probably once endeared it to its exiled occupants. As Hermanric seated himself by Antonina's side on the simple couch which made the principal piece of furniture in the place, and looked forth from the window over the same view that they had beheld in the garden, the magic stillness and novelty of the scene now began to affect his slow perceptions, as they had already influenced the finer and more sensitive faculties of the thoughtful girl. New hopes and tranquil ideas arose in his young mind, and communicated an unusual gentleness to his expression, an unusual softness to his voice, as he thus addressed his silent companion:—

“ With such a home as this, with this garden, with that country beyond, with no warfare, no stern teachers, no enemy to threaten you; with companions and occupations that you loved—tell me, Antonina, would not your happiness be complete?”

As he looked round at the girl to listen to her reply, he saw that her countenance had changed.

Their past expression of deep grief had again returned to her features. Her eyes were fixed on the short dagger that hung over the Goth's breast, which seemed to have suddenly aroused in her a train of melancholy and unwelcome thoughts. When she at length spoke, it was in a mournful and altered voice, and with a mingled expression of resignation and despair.

"You must leave me—we must be parted again," said she; "the sight of your weapons has reminded me of all that until now I had forgotten, of all that I have left in Rome, of all that you have abandoned before the city walls. Once I thought we might have escaped together from the turmoil and the danger around us, but now I know that it is better that you should depart! Alas, for my hopes and my happiness, I must be left alone once more!"

She paused for an instant, struggling to retain her self-possession, and then continued:—

"Yes, you must quit me, and return to your post before the city; for in the day of assault, there will be none to care for my father but you!"

Until I know that he is safe, until I can see him once more, and ask him for pardon, and entreat him for love, I dare not remove from the perilous precincts of Rome ! Return, then, to your duties, and your companions, and your occupations of martial renown ; and do not forget Numerian when the city is assailed, nor Antonina, who is left to think on you in the solitary plains ! ”

She rose from her place, as if to set the example of departing ; but her strength and resolution both failed her, and she sank down again on the couch, incapable of making another movement, or uttering another word.

Strong and conflicting emotions passed over the heart of the Goth. The language of the girl had quickened the remembrance of his half-forgotten duties, and strengthened the failing influence of his old predilections of education and race. Both his conscience and his inclinations now opposed his disputing her urgent and unselfish request. For a few minutes he remained plunged in reflection ; then he rose and looked earnestly from the window ; then back again upon Antonina, and the room they

occupied. At length, as if animated by a sudden determination, he again approached his companion, and thus addressed her :—

“ It is right that I should return. I will do your bidding, and depart for the camp (but not till the break of day), while you, Antonina, remain in concealment and in safety here. None can come hither to disturb you. The Goths will not revisit the fields they have already stripped ; the husbandman who owns this dwelling is imprisoned in the beleaguered city ; the peasants from the country beyond dare not approach so near to the invading hosts ; and Goisvintha, whom you dread, knows not even of the existence of such a refuge as this. Here, though lonely, you will be secure ; here you can await my return, when each succeeding night gives me the opportunity of departing from the camp ; and here I will warn you beforehand, if the city is devoted to an assault. Though solitary, you will not be abandoned,—we shall not be parted one from the other. Often and often I shall return to look on you, and to listen to you, and to love you ! You will be happier here, even in this

lonely place, than in the former home that you have lost through your father's wrath ! ”

“ Oh, I will willingly remain—I will joyfully await you ! ” cried the girl, raising her beaming eyes to Hermanric's face. “ I will never speak mournfully to you again ; I will never remind you more, of all that I have suffered, and all that I have lost ! How merciful you were to me, when I first saw you in your tent—how doubly merciful you are to me here ! I am proud when I look on your stature, and your strength, and your heavy weapons, and know that you are happy in remaining with *me* ; that you will succour my father ; that you will return from your glittering encampments to this farm-house, where I am left to await you ! Already I have forgotten all that has happened to me of woe ; already I am more joyful than ever I was in my life before ! See, I am no longer weeping in sorrow ! If there are any tears still on my cheeks, they are the tears of gladness that every one welcomes—tears to sing and rejoice in ! ”

She ceased abruptly, as if words failed to give expression to her new delight. All the gloomy

emotions that had oppressed her but a short time before, had now completely vanished ; and the young fresh heart, superior still to despair and woe, basked as happily again in its native atmosphere of joy, as a bird in the sunlight of morning and spring.

Then, when after an interval of delay their former tranquillity had returned to them, how softly and lightly the quiet hours of the remaining night flowed onward, to the two watchers in the lonely house ! How happily the delighted girl disclosed her hidden thoughts, and poured forth her innocent confessions, to the dweller among other nations and the child of other impressions, than her own ! All the various reflections aroused in her mind by the natural objects she had secretly studied, by the mighty imagery of her Bible lore, by the gloomy histories of saints' visions and martyrs' sufferings, which she had learnt and pondered over by her father's side, were now drawn from their treasured places in her memory, and addressed to the ear of the Goth. As the child flies to the nurse with the story of its first toy ; as the girl resorts to the sister

with the confession of her first love; as the poet hurries to the friend with the plan of his first composition; so did Antonina seek the attention of Hermanric with the first outward revealings enjoyed by her faculties, and the first acknowledgment of her emotions liberated from her heart.

The longer the Goth listened to her, the more perfect became the enchantment of her words, half struggling into poetry, and her voice half gliding into music. As her low, still, varying tones wound smoothly into his ear, his thoughts suddenly and intuitively reverted to her formerly expressed remembrances of her lost lute, inciting him to ask her, with new interest and animation, of the manner of her acquisition of that knowledge of song, which she had already assured him that she possessed.

“I have learned many odes of many poets,” said she, quickly and confusedly avoiding the mention of Vetrano, which a direct answer to Hermanric’s question must have produced, “but I remember none perfectly, save those whose theme is of spirits and of other worlds, and of the invisible beauty that we think of but cannot see. Of the few that

I know of these, there is one that I first learned and love most. I will sing it, that you may be assured I will not fail to you in my promised art.

She hesitated for a moment. Sorrowful remembrances of the events that had followed the utterance of the last notes she sang in her father's garden, swelled within her, and held her speechless. Soon, however, after a short interval of silence, she recovered her self-possession, and began to sing, in low, tremulous tones, that harmonized well with the character of the words and the strain of the melody which she had chosen.

THE MISSION OF THE TEAR.

I.

The skies were its birth-place—the TEAR was the child
Of the dark maiden SORROW, by young JOY beguiled ;
It was born in convulsion ; 'twas nurtur'd in woe ;
And the world was yet young when it wander'd below.

II.

No angel-bright guardians watch'd over its birth,
Ere yet it was suffer'd to roam upon earth ;
No spirits of gladness its soft form caress'd ;
SIGHS mourn'd round its cradle, and hush'd it to rest.

III.

Though JOY might endeavour, with kisses and wiles,
To lure it away to his household of smiles ;
From the daylight he lived in it turn'd in affright,
To nestle with SORROW in climates of night.

IV.

When it came upon earth, 'twas to choose a career,
The brightest and best that is left to a TEAR ;
To hallow delight, and bestow the relief
Denied by despair to the fulness of grief.

V.

Few repell'd it—some bless'd it—wherever it came ;
Whether soft'ning their sorrow, or soothing their shame ;
And the joyful themselves, though its name they might fear,
Oft welcom'd the calming approach of the TEAR !

VI.

Years on years have worn onward, as—watched from above
Speeds that meek spirit yet on its labour of love ;
Still the exile of Heav'n, it ne'er shall away ;
Every heart has a home for it, roam where it may !

For the first few minutes after she had concluded the ode, Hermanric was hardly conscious that she had ceased ; and when at length she looked up at him, her mute petition for approval had an eloquence which would have been marred to the Goth at that moment, by the utterance of a single word. A rapture, an inspiration, a new life moved within him. The hour and the scene completed what the magic of the song had begun. His expressions now glowed with a southern warmth ; his words assumed a Roman fervour. Gradually as they discoursed, the voice of the girl was less

frequently audible. A change was passing over her spirit: from the teacher, she was now becoming the pupil.

As she still listened to the Goth, as she felt the birth of new feelings within her while he spoke, her cheeks glowed, her features lightened up, her very form seemed to freshen and expand. No intruding thought or awakening remembrance disturbed her rapt attention. No cold doubt, no gloomy hesitation, appeared in her companion's words. The one listened, the other spoke, with the whole heart, the undivided soul. While a world-wide revolution was concentrating its hurricane forces around them; while the city of an Empire tottered already to its tremendous fall; while Goisvintha plotted new revenge; while Ulpius toiled for his revolution of bloodshed and ruin; while all these dark materials of public misery and private strife seethed and strengthened around them, they could as completely forget the stormy outward world, in themselves; they could think as serenely of tranquil love; the kiss could be given as passionately, and returned as tenderly, as if the

lot of their existence had been cast in the pastoral days of the shepherd-poets, and the future of their duties and enjoyments was securely awaiting them in a land of eternal peace !

BOOK SECOND.

“ Qu’arrive-t-il ? la mort, la mort fatale.”— *Voltaire*.

CHAPTER I.

THE FAMINE.

THE end of November is approaching. Nearly a month has elapsed since the occurrence of the events mentioned in the last Chapter, yet still the Gothic lines stretch round the city walls. Rome, that we left haughty and luxurious even while ruin threatened her at her gates, has now suffered a terrible and warning change. As we approach her again, woe, horror, and desolation have already gone forth to shadow her lofty palaces and to darken her brilliant streets.

Over Pomp that spurned it, over Pleasure that defied it, over Plenty that scared it in its secret rounds, the spectre Hunger has now risen triumphant at last. Day by day has the city's insuf-

ficient allowance of food been more and more sparingly doled out ; higher and higher has risen the value of the coarsest and simplest provision ; the hoarded supplies that pity and charity have already bestowed to cheer the sinking people, have reached their utmost limits. For the rich, there is still corn in the city—treasure of food to be bartered for treasure of gold. For the poor, man's natural nourishment exists no more ; the season of famine's loathsome feasts, the first days of the sacrifice of choice to necessity, have darkly and irretrievably begun.

It is morning. A sad and noiseless throng is advancing over the cold flagstones of the Great Square, before the Basilica of St. John Lateran. The members of the assembly speak in whispers. The weak are tearful—the strong are gloomy—they all move with slow and languid gait, and hold in their arms their dogs or other domestic animals. On the outskirts of the crowd march the enfeebled guards of the city, grasping in their rough hands, rare, favourite birds of gaudy plumage and melodious note, and followed by children and

young girls vainly and piteously entreating that their favourites may be restored.

This strange procession pauses, at length, before a mighty cauldron slung over a great fire in the middle of the Square, round which stand the city butchers with bare knives, and the trustiest men of the Roman legions with threatening weapons. A proclamation is then repeated, commanding the populace who have no money left to purchase food, to bring up their domestic animals to be boiled together over the public furnace, for the sake of contributing to the public support.

The next minute, in pursuance of this edict, the dumb favourites of the crowd passed from the owner's caressing hand into the butcher's ready grasp. The faint cries of the animals, starved like their masters, mingled for a few moments with the sobs and lamentations of the women and children, to whom the greater part of them belonged. For, in this the first stage of their calamities, that severity of hunger which extinguishes pity and estranges grief was unknown to the populace; and though fast losing spirit, they had not yet sunk

to the depths of ferocious despair, which even now were invisibly opening beneath them. A thousand pangs were felt, a thousand humble tragedies were acted in the brief moments of separation between guardian and charge. The child snatched its last kiss of the bird that had sung over its bed; the dog looked its last entreaty for protection from the mistress who had once never met it without a caress. Then came the short interval of agony and death, then the steam rose fiercely from the greedy cauldron, and then the people for a time dispersed; the sorrowful to linger near the confines of the fire, and the hungry to calm their impatience by a visit to the neighbouring church.

The marble aisles of the noble Basilica held a gloomy congregation. Three small candles were alone lighted on the high altar. No sweet voices sang melodious anthems or exulting hymns. The monks, in hoarse tones and monotonous harmonies, chanted the penitential psalms. Here and there knelt a figure clothed in mourning robes, and absorbed in secret prayer; but over the majority

of the assembly, either blank despondency or sullen inattention universally prevailed.

As the last dull notes of the last psalm died away among the lofty recesses of the church, a procession of pious Christians appeared at the door and advanced slowly to the altar. It was composed both of men and women bare-footed, clothed in black garments, and with ashes scattered over their dishevelled hair. Tears flowed from their eyes, and they beat their breasts as they bowed their foreheads on the marble pavement of the altar steps.

This humble public expression of penitence under the calamity that had now fallen on the city was, however, confined only to its few really religious inhabitants, and commanded neither sympathy nor attention from the heartless and obstinate population of Rome. Some still cherished the delusive hope of assistance from the Court of Ravenna; others believed that the Goths would ere long impatiently abandon their protracted blockade, to stretch their ravages over the rich and unprotected fields of southern Italy. But the

same blind confidence in the lost terrors of the Roman name, the same fierce and reckless determination to defy the Goths to the very last, sustained the sinking courage and crushed the despondent emotions of the great mass of the suffering people ; from the beggar who prowled for garbage, to the patrician who sighed over his new and unwelcome nourishment of simple bread.

While the penitents who formed the procession above described were yet engaged in the performance of their unnoticed and unshared duties of penance and prayer, a priest ascended the great pulpit of the Basilica, to attempt the ungrateful task of preaching patience and piety to the hungry multitude at his feet.

He began his sermon by retracing the principal occurrences in Rome, since the beginning of the Gothic blockade. He touched cautiously upon the first event that stained the annals of the besieged city—the execution of the widow of the Roman general Stilicho, on the unauthorised suspicion that she had held treasonable communication with Alaric and the invading army ; he noticed

lengthily the promises of assistance transmitted from Ravenna, after the perpetration of that ill-omened act. He spoke admiringly of the skill displayed by the government in making the necessary and immediate reductions in the daily supplies of food ; he lamented the terrible scarcity which followed, too inevitably, those seasonable reductions. He pronounced an eloquent eulogium on the noble charity of Læta, the widow of the emperor Gratian, who, with her mother, devoted the store of provisions obtained by their imperial revenues to succouring, at that important juncture, the starving and desponding poor : he admitted the new scarcity consequent on the dissipation of Læta's stores ; deplored the present necessity of sacrificing the domestic animals of the citizens ; condemned the enormous prices now demanded for the last remnants of wholesome food that were garnered up ; announced it as the firm persuasion of every one that a few days more would bring help from Ravenna ; and ended his address by informing his auditory that, as they had suffered so much already, they could patiently suffer a little more, and that

if after this they were so ill-fated as to sink under their calamities, they would feel it a noble consolation to die in the cause of Catholic and Apostolic Rome, and would assuredly be canonised as saints and martyrs by the next generation of the pious in the first interval of fertile and restoring peace.

Flowing as was the eloquence of this oration, it yet possessed not the power of inducing one among those whom it addressed to forget the sensation of his present suffering, and to fix his attention on the vision of future advantage, spread before all listeners by the fluent priest. With the same murmurs of querulous complaint, and the same expressions of impotent hatred and defiance of the Goths, which had fallen from them as they entered the church, the populace now departed from it, to receive from the city officers the stinted allowance of repugnant food, prepared for their hunger from the cauldron in the public square.

And see, already from other haunts in the neighbouring quarter of Rome, their fellow-citizens press onward at the given signal, to meet them round the cauldron's sides ! The languid sentinel, released

from duty, turns his gaze from the sickening prospect of the Gothic camp, and hastens to share the public meal ; the baker starts from sleeping on his empty counter, the beggar rises from his kennel in the butcher's vacant outhouse, the slave deserts his place by the smouldering kitchen fire—all hurry to swell the numbers of the guests that are bidden to the wretched feast. Rapidly and universally, the congregation in the Basilica pours through its lofty gates ; the priests and penitents retire from the altar's foot, and in the great church, so crowded but a few moments before, there now only remains the figure of a solitary man.

Since the commencement of the service, neither addressed nor observed, this lonely being has faltered round the circle of the congregation, gazing long and wistfully over the faces that met his view. Now that the sermon is ended, and the last lingerer has quitted the church, he turns from the spot whence he has anxiously watched the different members of the departing throng, and feebly crouches down on his knees at the base of a pillar that is near him. His eyes are hollow, and his cheeks are

wan ; his thin gray hairs are few and fading on his aged head. He makes no effort to follow the crowd and partake their sustenance ; no one is left behind to urge, no one returns to lead him to the public meal. Though weak and old, he is perfectly forsaken in his loneliness, perfectly unsolaced in his grief ; his friends have lost all trace of him ; his enemies have ceased to fear or to hate him now. As he crouches by the pillar alone, he covers his forehead with his pale, palsied hands, his dim eyes fill with bitter tears, and such expressions as these are ever and anon faintly audible in the intervals of his heavy sighs :—" Day after day ! Day after day ! And my lost one is not found, my loved and wronged one is not restored ! Antonina ! Antonina !"

* * * *

Some days after the public distribution of food in the square of St. John Lateran, Vetrano's favourite freedman might have been observed pursuing his way homeward, sadly and slowly, to his master's palace.

It was not without cause that the pace of the

intelligent Carrio was funereal, and his expression disconsolate. Even during the short period that had elapsed since the scene in the Basilica already described, the condition of the city had altered fearfully for the worse. The famine advanced with giant strides; every succeeding hour endued it with new vigour, every effort to repel it served but to increase its spreading and overwhelming influence. One after another the pleasures and pursuits of the city declined beneath the dismal oppression of the universal ill, until the public spirit in Rome became moved alike in all classes by one gloomy inspiration—a despairing defiance of the famine and the Goths.

The freedman entered his master's palace neither saluted nor welcomed by the once obsequious slaves in the outer lodge. Neither harps nor singing boys, neither woman's ringing laughter nor man's bacchanalian glee, now woke the echoes in the lonely halls. The pulse of pleasure seemed to have throbbed its last in the joyless being of Vetrano's altered household.

Hastening his steps as he entered the mansion,

Carrio passed into the chamber where the senator awaited him.

On two couches, separated by a small table, reclined the lord of the palace, and his pupil and companion at Ravenna, the once sprightly Camilla. Vetranio's open brow had contracted a clouded and severe expression; and he neither regarded nor addressed his visitor, who, on her part, remained as silent and as melancholy as himself. Every trace of the former characteristics of the gay, elegant voluptuary, and the lively, prattling girl, seemed to have completely vanished. On the table between them stood a large bottle, containing Falernian wine, and a vase, filled with a little watery soup, in the middle of which floated a small dough cake, sparingly sprinkled with common herbs. As for the usual accompaniments of Vetranio's luxurious privacy, they were nowhere to be seen. Poems, pictures, trinkets, lutes, all were absent. Even the "inestimable kitten of the breed most worshipped by the ancient Egyptians," appeared no more. It had been stolen, cooked, and eaten, by a runaway slave, who had already bartered its ruby collar for

a lean parrot and the unroasted half of the carcase of a dog.

“I lament to confess it, oh estimable patron, but my mission has failed,” observed Carrio, producing from his cloak several bags of money and boxes of jewels, which he carefully deposited on the table. “The Prefect has himself assisted in searching the public and private granaries, and has arrived at the conclusion that not a handful of corn is left in the city. I offered publicly in the market-places, five thousand sestertii for a living cock and hen, but was told that the race had long since been exterminated, and that, as money would no longer buy food, money was no longer desired by the poorest beggar in Rome. There is no more even of the hay I yesterday purchased, to be obtained for the most extravagant bribes. Those still possessing the smallest supplies of provision, guard and hide them with the most jealous care. I have done nothing but obtain for the consumption of the few slaves who yet remain faithful in the house, this small store of dogs’ hides, reserved from the public distribution of

some days since, in the square of the Basilica of St. John."

And the freedman, with an air of mingled triumph and disgust, produced as he spoke, his provision of dirty skins.

"What supplies have we still left in our possession?" demanded Vetrano, after drinking a deep draught of the Falernian, and motioning his servant to place his treasured burdens out of sight.

"I have hidden in a secure receptacle, for I know not how soon hunger may drive the slaves to disobedience," rejoined Carrio, "seven bags of hay, three baskets stocked with salted horse-flesh, a sweetmeat-box filled with oats, and another with dried parsley; the rare Indian singing birds are still preserved inviolate in their aviary, there is a great store of spices, and some bottles of the Nightingale Sauce yet remain."

"What is the present aspect of the city?" interrupted Vetrano impatiently.

"Rome is as gloomy as a subterranean sepulchre," replied Carrio, with a shudder. "The people congregate in speechless and hungry mobs, at the

doors of their houses and the corners of the streets; the sentinels at the ramparts totter on their posts; women and children are sleeping exhausted on the very pavements of the churches; the theatres are emptied of actors and audience alike; the baths resound with cries for food, and curses on the Goths; thefts are already committed in the open and unguarded shops; and the barbarians remain fixed in their encampments, unapproached by our promised legions from Ravenna, neither assaulting us in our weakness, nor preparing to raise the blockade! Our situation grows more and more perilous—I have great hopes in our store of provisions; but—”

“Cast your hopes to the Court at Ravenna, and your beasts’ provender to the howling mob!” cried Vetrano with sudden energy. “It is now too late to yield; if the next few days bring us no assistance, the city will be a human shamble! And think you that I, who have already lost in this public suspension of social joys my pleasures, my employments, and my companions, will wait serenely for the lingering and ignoble death that

must then threaten us all? No! it shall never be said that I died starving with the herd, like a slave that his master deserts! Though the plates in my banquetting hall must now be empty, my vases and wine-cups shall yet sparkle for my guests! There is still wine in the cellar, and spices and perfumes in the larder stores! I will invite my friends to a last feast; a saturnalia in a city of famine; a banquet of death, spread by the jovial labours of Silenus and his fauns! Though the *Parcæ* have woven for me the destiny of a dog, it is the hand of Bacchus that shall sever the fatal thread!"

His cheeks were flushed, his eyes sparkled; all the mad energy of his determination appeared in his face as he spoke. He was no longer the light, amiable, smooth-tongued trifler; but a moody, reckless, desperate man, careless of every obligation and pursuit which had hitherto influenced the easy surface of his patrician life. The startled Camilla, who had as yet preserved a melancholy silence, ran towards him with affrighted looks and undissembled tears. Carrio stared in vacant astonishment

on his master's disordered countenance ; and, forgetting his bundle of dog skins, suffered them to drop unheeded on the floor. A few moments of silence followed, which were suddenly interrupted by the abrupt entrance of a fourth person, pale, trembling and breathless, who was no other than Vetranio's former visitor, the Prefect Pompeianus.

“ I bid you welcome to my approaching feast of brimming wine-cups and empty dishes ! ” cried Vetranio, pouring the sparkling Falernian into his empty glass. “ The last banquet given in Rome, ere the city is annihilated, will be mine ! The Goths and the famine shall have no part in my death ! Pleasure shall preside at my last moments, as she has presided at my whole life ! I will die like Sardanapalus, with my loves and my treasures around me ; and the last of my guests who remains proof against our festivity shall set fire to *my* palace, as the kingly Assyrian set fire to *his* ! ”

“ This is no season for jesting,” exclaimed the Prefect, staring round him with bewildered eyes and colourless cheeks. “ Our miseries are but

dawning as yet ! In the next street lies the corpse of a woman, and—horrible omen !—a coil of serpents is wreathed about her neck ! We have no burial place to receive her, and the thousands who may die like her, ere assistance arrives ! The city sepulchres outside the walls, are in the hands of the Goths. The people stand round the body, in a trance of horror, for they have now discovered a fatal truth we would fain have concealed from them ;” here the Prefect paused, looked round affrightedly on his listeners, and added in low trembling tones : “ the citizens are lying dead from famine in the streets of Rome !” *

* See note in Appendix—“The Famine.”

CHAPTER II.

THE CITY AND THE GODS.

WE return once more to the Gothic encampment, in the suburbs eastward of the Pincian gate, and to Hermanric and the warriors under his command, who are still posted at that particular position on the great circle of the blockade.

The movements of the young chieftain from post to post, expressed, in their variety and rapidity, the restlessness that was agitating his mind. He glanced back frequently from the warriors around him to the remote and opposite quarter of the suburbs, occasionally directing his eyes towards the western horizon, as if anxiously awaiting the approach of some particular hour of the coming night. Weary at length of pursuing occupations which evidently irritated rather than soothed his

impatience, he turned abruptly from his companions, and advancing towards the city, paced slowly backwards and forwards over the waste ground between the suburbs and the walls of Rome.

At intervals he still continued to examine the scene around him. A more dreary prospect than now met his view, whether in earth or sky, can hardly be conceived.

The dull, sunless day was fast closing, and the portentous heaven gave promise of a stormy night. Thick, black layers of shapeless cloud, hung over the whole firmament, save at the western point; and here lay a streak of pale, yellow light, enclosed on all sides by the firm, ungraduated, irregular edges of the masses of gloomy vapour around it. A deep silence hung over the whole atmosphere. The wind was voiceless among the steady trees. The stir and action in the being of nature and the life of man seemed enthralled, suspended, stifled. The air was laden with a burdensome heat; and all things on earth, animate and inanimate, felt the oppression that weighed on them from the higher

elements. The people who lay gasping for breath in the famine-stricken city, and the blades of grass that drooped languidly on the dry sward beyond its walls, owned its enfeebling influence alike.

As the hours wore on and night stealthily and gradually advanced, a monotonous darkness overspread, one after another, the objects discernible to Hermanric from the solitary ground he still occupied. Soon, the great city faded into one vast, impenetrable shadow; while the suburbs and the low country around them, vanished in the thick darkness that gathered almost perceptibly over the earth. And now the sole object distinctly visible was the figure of a weary sentinel, who stood on the frowning rampart immediately above the rifted wall, and whose drooping figure, propped upon his weapon, was indicated in hard relief against the thin, solitary streak of light still shining in the cold and cloudy wastes of the western sky.

But as the night still deepened, this one space of light, faded, contracted, vanished; and with it disappeared the sentinel and the line of rampart on which he was posted. The rule of the darkness

now became universal. Densely and rapidly, it overspread the whole city with startling suddenness: as if the fearful destiny now working its fulfilment in Rome, had forced the external appearances of the night into harmony with its own woe-boding nature.

Then, as the young Goth still lingered at his post of observation, the long, low, tremulous, absorbing roll of thunder afar off became grandly audible. It seemed to proceed from a distance almost incalculable; to be sounding from its cradle in the frozen north; to be journeying about its ice-girdled chambers in the lonely poles. It deepened rather than interrupted the dreary mysterious stillness of the atmosphere. The lightning, too, had a summer softness in its noiseless and frequent gleam. It was not the fierce lightning of winter, but a warm, fitful brightness, almost fascinating in its light, rapid recurrence, tinged with the glow of heaven, and not with the glare of hell.

There was no wind—no rain; and the air was as hushed as if it slept over chaos in the infancy of a new creation.

Among the objects displayed, instant by instant, by the rapid lightning to the eyes of Hermanric, none was so easily and distinctly visible as the broad undiversified surface of the rifted wall. The large, loose stones, scattered here and there at its base, and the overhanging lid of its broad rampart, became plainly though fitfully apparent in the brief moments of their illumination. The lightning had played for some time over the structure of the fortifications, and the bare ground that stretched immediately beyond them, when the smooth prospect which it thus gave by glimpses to view, was suddenly checquered by a flight of birds appearing from one of the lower divisions of the wall, and flitting uneasily to and fro at one spot before its surface.

As moment after moment the lightning continued to gleam, so the black forms of the birds were visible to the practised eye of the Goth—perceptible, yet evanescent, as sparks of fire, or flakes of snow—whirling confusedly and continually about the spot whence they had evidently been startled by some unimaginable interruption. At length,

after a lapse of some time, they vanished as suddenly as they had appeared, with shrill notes of affright which were audible even above the continuous rolling of the thunder; and immediately afterwards, when the lightning alternated with the darkness, there appeared to Hermanric in the part of the wall where the birds had been first disturbed, a small red gleam, like a spark of fire lodged in the surface of the structure. Then this was lost; a longer obscurity than usual prevailed in the atmosphere, and when the Goth gazed eagerly through the next succession of flashes, they showed him the momentary and doubtful semblance of a human figure, standing erect on the stones at the base of the wall.

Hermanric started with astonishment. Again the lightning ceased. In the ardour of his anxiety to behold more, he strained his eyes with the vain hope of penetrating the obscurity around him. The darkness seemed interminable. Once again the lightning flashed brilliantly out. He looked eagerly towards the wall--the figure was still there.

His heart throbbed quickly within him, as he

stood irresolute on the spot he had occupied since the first peal of thunder had struck upon his ear. Were the light and the man—one seen but for an instant ; the other, still perceptible—mere phantoms of his erring sight, dazzled by the quick recurrence of atmospheric changes through which it had acted ? Or, did he indubitably behold a human form ; and had he really observed a material light ? Some strange treachery, some dangerous mystery, might be engendering in the besieged city, which it would be his duty to observe and unmask. He drew his sword ; and, at the risk of being observed through the lightning, and heard during the pauses in the thunder, by the sentinel on the wall, resolutely advanced to the very foot of the fortifications of hostile Rome.

He heard no sound, perceived no light, observed no figure, as, after several unsuccessful attempts to reach the place where they stood, he at length paused at the loose stones which he knew were heaped at the base of the wall. The next moment he was so close to it, that he could pass his sword-point over parts of its rugged surface. He had

scarcely examined thus, a space of more than ten yards, before his weapon encountered a sharp, jagged edge; and a sudden presentiment assured him instantly, that he had found the spot where he had beheld the momentary light, and that he stood on the same stone which had been afterwards occupied by the figure of the man.

After an instant's hesitation, he was about to mount higher on the loose stones, and examine more closely the irregularity he had just discovered in the wall, when a vivid flash of lightning, unusually prolonged, showed him, barring at scarcely a yard's distance his onward path, the figure he had already distantly beheld from the plain behind.

There was something inexpressibly fearful in his viewless vicinity, during the next moment of darkness, to this silent, mysterious form, so imperfectly shown by the lightning that quivered over its half-revealed proportions. Every pulse in the body of the Goth seemed to pause as he stood, with ready weapon, looking into the gloomy darkness, and waiting for the next flash. It came—and displayed

to him the man's fierce eyes glaring steadily down upon his face—another gleam ; and he beheld his haggard finger placed upon his lip in token of silence—a third ; and he saw the arm of the figure pointing towards the plain behind him ; and then in the darkness that followed, a hot breath played upon his ear, and a voice whispered to him, through a pause in the rolling of the thunder ;—“ Follow me.”

The next instant Hermanric felt the momentary contact of the man's body, as with noiseless step he passed him on the stones. It was no time to deliberate or to doubt. He followed close upon the stranger's footsteps, gaining glimpses of his dark form moving onward before, whenever the lightning briefly illuminated the scene, until they arrived at a clump of trees, not far distant from the houses in the suburbs that were occupied by the Goths under his own command.

Here the stranger paused before the trunk of a tree which stood between the city wall and himself, and drew from beneath his ragged cloak a small lantern, carefully covered with a piece of cloth,

which he now removed, and holding the light high above his head, regarded the Goth with a steady and anxious scrutiny.

Hermanric attempted to address him first, but the appearance of the man, dimly perceptible though it was by the feeble light of his lantern, was so startling and repulsive, that the half-formed words died away on his lips. The face of the stranger was of a ghastly paleness; his hollow cheeks were seamed with deep wrinkles; and his eyes glared with an expression of ferocious suspicion. One of his arms was covered with old bandages, stiff with coagulated blood, and hung paralysed at his side. The hand that held the light trembled, so that the lantern containing it vibrated continuously in his unsteady grasp. His limbs were lank and shrivelled almost to deformity, and it was with evident difficulty that he stood upright on his feet. Every member of his body seemed to be wasting with a gradual death, while his expression, ardent and forbidding, was stamped with all the energy of manhood, and all the daring of youth.

It was Ulpius ! The wall was passed ! The breach was made good !

After a protracted examination of Hermanric's countenance and attire, the man, with an imperious expression, strangely at variance with his hollow, faltering voice, thus addressed him :—

“ You are a Goth ? ”

“ I am,” rejoined the young chief: “ and you are—— ”

“ A friend to the Goths,” was the quick answer.

A momentary silence followed. The dialogue was then again begun by the stranger.

“ What brought you alone to the base of the ramparts ? ” he demanded, and an expression of ungovernable apprehension shot from his eyes as he spoke.

“ I saw the appearance of a man in the gleam of the lightning,” answered Hermanric. “ I approached it, to assure myself that my eyes had not deluded me, to discover—— ”

“ There is but one man of your nation who shall discover whence I came, and what I would obtain.” interrupted the stranger fiercely; “ that man is Alaric, your King.”

Surprise, indignation, and contempt appeared in the features of the Goth, as he listened to such a declaration from the helpless outcast before him. The man perceived it, and motioning to him to be silent, again addressed him.

“Listen!” cried he, “I have that to reveal to the leader of your forces which will stir the hearts of every man in your encampments, if you are trusted with the secret after your King has heard it from my lips! Do you still refuse to guide me to his tent?”

Hermanric laughed scornfully.

“Look on me,” pursued the man, bending forward, and fixing his eyes with savage earnestness upon his listener’s face. “I am alone, old, wounded, weak,—a stranger to your nation,—a famished and a helpless man! Should I venture into your camp—should I risk being slain for a Roman by your comrades—should I dare the wrath of your imperious ruler without a cause?”

He paused; and then still keeping his eyes on the Goth, continued in lower and more agitated tones:—

“Deny me your help, I will wander through

your camp till I find your King! Imprison me, your violence will not open my lips! Slay me, you will gain nothing by my death! But aid me, and to the latest moment of your life you will rejoice in the deed! I have words of terrible import for Alaric's ear,—a secret, in the gaining of which, I have paid the penalty thus!”

He pointed to his wounded arm. The solemnity of his voice; the rough energy of his words; the stern determination of his aspect; the darkness of the night that was round them; the rolling thunder that seemed to join itself to their discourse; the impressive mystery of their meeting under the city walls, all began to exert their powerful and different influences over the mind of the Goth, changing insensibly the sentiments at first inspired in him by the man's communications. He hesitated, and looked round doubtfully towards the lines of the camp.

There was a long silence, which was again interrupted by the stranger.

“Guard me, chain me, mock at me if you will!” he cried, with raised voice and flashing eyes, “but

lead me to Alaric's tent ! I swear to you, by the thunder pealing over our heads, that the words I would speak to him will be more precious in his eyes, than the brightest jewel he could ravish from the coffers of Rome."

Though visibly troubled and impressed, Hermanric still hesitated.

"Do you yet delay?" exclaimed the man, with contemptuous impatience. "Stand back ! I will pass on by myself into the very heart of your camp ! I entered on my project alone—I will work its fulfilment without help ! Stand back !"

And he moved past Hermanric in the direction of the suburbs, with the same look of fierce energy on his withered features which had marked them so strikingly at the outset of his extraordinary interview with the young chieftain.

The daring devotion to his purpose, the reckless toiling after a dangerous and doubtful success, manifested in the words and actions of one so feeble and unaided as the stranger, aroused in the Goth that sentiment of irrepressible admiration, which the union of moral and physical courage

inevitably awakens. In addition to the incentive to aid the man thus created, an ardent curiosity to discover his secret filled the mind of Hermanic, and further powerfully inclined him to conduct his determined companion into Alaric's presence—for by such a proceeding only could he hope, after the man's firm declaration that he would communicate in the first instance to no one but the King, to penetrate ultimately the object of his mysterious errand. Animated, therefore, by such motives as these, he called to the stranger to stop ; and briefly communicated to him his willingness to conduct him instantly to the presence of the leader of the Goths.

The man intimated by a sign his readiness to accept the offer. His physical powers were now evidently fast failing ; but he still tottered painfully onward as they moved to the head-quarters of the camp, muttering and gesticulating to himself almost incessantly. Once only did he address his conductor during their progress ; and then with a startling abruptness of manner, and in tones of vehement anxiety and suspicion, he demanded of

the young Goth if he had ever examined the surface of the city wall before that night. Hermanric replied in the negative ; and they then proceeded in perfect silence.

Their way lay through the line of encampment to the westward, and was imperfectly lighted by the flame of an occasional torch, or the glow of a distant watchfire. The thunder had diminished in frequency, but had increased in volume ; faint breaths of wind soared up fitfully from the west ; and already a few rain-drops fell slowly to the thirsty earth. The warriors not actually on duty at the different posts of observation, had retired to the shelter of their tents ; none of the thousand idlers and attendants attached to the great army appeared at their usual haunts ; even the few voices that were audible sounded distant and low. The night-scene here among the ranks of the invaders of Italy, was as gloomy and repelling as on the solitary plains before the walls of Rome.

Ere long the stranger perceived that they had reached a part of the camp more thickly peopled, more carefully illuminated, more strongly fortified.

than that through which they had already passed ; and the liquid, rushing sound of the waters of the rapid Tiber now caught his suspicious and attentive ear. They still moved onward a few yards ; and then paused suddenly before a tent, immediately surrounded by many others, and occupied at all its approaches by groups of richly-armed warriors. Here Hermanric stopped an instant to parley with a sentinel, who after a short delay raised the outer covering of the entrance to the tent, and the moment after the Roman adventurer beheld himself standing by his conductor's side in the presence of the Gothic King.

The interior of Alaric's tent was lined with skins, and illuminated by one small lamp, fastened to the centre pole that supported its roof. The only articles of furniture in the place were some bundles of furs flung down loosely on the ground, and a large, rudely-carved wooden chest, on which stood a polished human skull, hollowed into a sort of clumsy wine-cup. A thoroughly Gothic ruggedness of aspect, a stately northern simplicity prevailed over the spacious tent, and was indicated

not merely in its thick shadows, its calm lights, and its freedom from pomp and glitter, but even in the appearance and employment of its remarkable occupant.

Alaric was seated alone on the wooden chest already described, contemplating with bent brow and abstracted gaze, some old Runic characters, traced upon the carved surface of a brass and silver shield, full five feet high, which rested against the side of the tent. The light of the lamp falling upon the polished surface of the weapon—rendered doubly bright by the dark skins behind it—was reflected back upon the figure of the Goth chief. It glowed upon his ample cuirass; it revealed his firm lips, slightly curled by an expression of scornful triumph; it displayed the grand, muscular formation of his arm, which rested—clothed in tightly-fitting leather—upon his knee; it partly brightened over his short, light hair; and glittered steadily in his fixed, thoughtful, manly eyes, which were just perceptible beneath the partial shadow of his contracted brow, while it left the lower part of his

body and his right hand, which was supported on the head of a huge, shaggy dog couching at his side, shadowed almost completely by the thick skins heaped confusedly against the sides of the wooden chest. He was so completely absorbed in the contemplation of the Runic characters, traced among the carved figures on his immense shield, that he did not notice the entry of Hermanric and the stranger, until the growl of the watchful dog suddenly disturbed him in his occupation. He looked up instantly; his quick, penetrating glance dwelling for a moment on the young chieftain, and then resting steadily and inquiringly on his companion's feeble and mutilated form.

Accustomed to the military brevity and promptitude exacted by his commander in all communications addressed to him by his inferiors, Hermanric, without waiting to be interrogated or attempting to preface or excuse his narrative, shortly related the conversation that had taken place between the stranger and himself on the plain near the Pincian Gate; and then waited respectfully to receive the commendation, or incur the rebuke of

the King, as the chance of the moment might happen to decide.

After again fixing his eyes in severe scrutiny on the person of the Roman, Alaric spoke to the young warrior in the Gothic language, thus :—

“ Leave the man with me—return to your post ; and there await whatever commands it may be necessary that I should despatch to you to-night.”

Hermanric immediately departed. Then, addressing the stranger for the first time, and speaking in the Latin language, the Gothic leader briefly and significantly intimated to his unknown visitant that they were now alone.

The man’s parched lips moved, opened, quivered ; his wild, hollow eyes brightened till they absolutely gleamed, but he seemed incapable of uttering a word ; his features became horribly convulsed, the foam gathered about his lips, he staggered forward and would have fallen to the ground, had not the king instantly caught him in his strong grasp, and placed him on the wooden chest that he had hitherto occupied himself.

“ Can a starving Roman have escaped from the

beleaguered city ?” muttered Alaric, as he took the skull cup, and poured some of the wine it contained down the stranger’s throat.

The liquor was immediately successful in restoring composure to the man’s features, and consciousness to his mind. He raised himself from the seat, dashed off the cold perspiration that overspread his forehead, and stood upright before the king—the solitary, powerless old man before the vigorous lord of thousands, in the midst of his warriors—without a tremor in his steady eye, or a prayer for protection on his haughty lip.

“I, a Roman,” he began, “come from Rome, against which the invader wars with the weapon of famine, to deliver the city, her people, her palaces, and her treasures, into the hands of Alaric the Goth.”

The king started, looked on the speaker for a moment, and then turned from him in impatience and contempt.

“I lie not,” pursued the enthusiast, with a calm dignity that affected even the hardy sensibilities of the Gothic hero. “Eye me again ! Could I come

starved, shrivelled, withered thus, from any place but Rome? Since I quitted the city, an hour has hardly past, and by the way that I left it the forces of the Goths may enter it to-night!”

“The proof of the harvest is in the quantity of the grain, not in the tongue of the husbandman—show me your open gates, and I will believe that you have spoken truth,” retorted the king, with a rough laugh.

“I betray the city,” resumed the man sternly, “but on one condition; grant it me, and—”

“I will grant you *your life*,” interrupted Alaric haughtily.

“My life!” cried the Roman, and his shrunken form seemed to expand, and his tremulous voice to grow firm and steady in the very bitterness of his contempt, as he spoke. “My life! I ask it not of your power! The wreck of my body is scarce strong enough to preserve it to me a single day! I have no home, no loves, no friends, no possessions! I live in Rome a solitary in the midst of the multitude, a pagan in a city of apostates! What is my life to *me*? I cherish it but for the

service of the gods, whose instruments of vengeance against the nation that has denied them, I would make you and your hosts ! If you slay me it is a sign to me from them that I am worthless in their cause. I shall die content."

He ceased. The king's manner, as he listened to him, gradually lost the bluntness and carelessness that had hitherto characterised it, and assumed an attention and a seriousness more in accordance with his high station and important responsibilities. He began to regard the stranger as no common renegade, no ordinary spy, no shallow impostor, who might be driven from his tent with disdain ; but as a man important enough to be heard, and ambitious enough to be distrusted. Accordingly, he resumed the seat from which he had risen during the interview, and calmly desired his newly ally to explain the condition, on the granting of which depended his promised betrayal of the city of Rome.

The pain-worn and despondent features of Ulpius became animated by a glow of triumph, as he heard the sudden mildness and moderation of

the king's demand; he raised his head proudly, and advanced a few steps, as he thus loudly and abruptly resumed :

“Assure to me the overthrow of the Christian churches, the extermination of the Christian priests, and the universal revival of the worship of the gods, and this night shall make you master of the chief city of the empire you are labouring to subvert !”

The boldness, the comprehensiveness, the insanity of wickedness displayed in such a proposition, and emanating from such a source, so astounded the mind of Alaric, as to deprive him for the moment of speech. The stranger, perceiving his temporary inability to answer him, broke the silence which ensued, and continued :

“Is my condition a hard one ? A conqueror is all-powerful ; he can overthrow the worship, as he can overthrow the government of a nation. What matters it to *you*, while empire, renown, and treasure are yours, what deities the people adore ? Is it a great price to pay for an easy conquest, to make a change which threatens neither your power,

your fame, nor your wealth? Do you marvel that I desire from you such a revolution as this? I was born for the gods, in their service I inherited rank and renown, for their cause I have suffered degradation and woe, for their restoration I will plot, combat, die! Assure me then, by oath, that with a new rule you will erect an ancient worship, and through my secret inlet to the city, I will introduce men enough of the Goths to murder with security the sentinels at the guardhouses, and open the gates of Rome to the numbers of your whole invading forces. Think not to despise the aid of a man unprotected and unknown! The citizens will never yield to your blockade; you shrink from risking the dangers of an assault; the legions of Ravenna are reported on their way hitherward—outcast as I am, I tell it to you here, in the midst of your camp—your speediest assurance of success rests on my discovery and on *me*!”

The king started suddenly from his seat:—“What fool or madman,” he cried, fixing his eyes in furious scorn and indignation on the stranger’s face, “prates to *me* about the legions of Ravenna

and the dangers of an assault? Think you, renegade, that your city could have resisted me had I chosen to storm it on the first day when I encamped before its walls? Know you that your effeminate soldiery have laid aside the armour of their ancestors, because their puny bodies are too feeble to bear its weight; and that the half of my army here, trebles the whole number of the guards of Rome? Now, while you stand before me, I have but to command and the city shall be annihilated with fire and sword, without the aid of one of the herd of traitors cowering beneath the shelter of its ill-defended walls!"

As Alaric spoke thus, some invisible agency seemed to crush, body and mind, the lost wretch whom he addressed. The shock of such an answer as he now heard seemed to strike him idiotic, as a flash of lightning strikes with blindness. He regarded the king with a bewildered stare, waving his hand tremulously backwards and forwards before his face, as if to clear some imaginary darkness off his eyes; then his arm fell helpless by his side, his head drooped upon his breast, and he

moaned out in low, vacant tones, "The restoration of the gods—that is the condition of conquest—the restoration of the gods!"

"I come not hither to be the tool of a frantic and forgotten priesthood," cried Alaric disdainfully. "Wherever I meet with your accursed idols I will melt them down into armour for my warriors and shoes for my horses; I will turn your temples into granaries, and cut your images of wood into billets for the watch-fires of my hosts!"

"Slay me, and be silent!" groaned the man, staggering back against the side of the tent, and shrinking under the merciless words of the Goth, like a slave under the lash.

"I leave the shedding of such blood as yours to your fellow Romans," answered the king; "they alone are worthy of the deed!"

No syllable of reply now escaped the stranger's lips, and after an interval of silence Alaric resumed, in tones divested of their former fiery irritation, and marked by a solemn earnestness that conferred irresistible dignity and force on every word that he uttered.

“Behold the characters engraven there!” said he, pointing to the shield; “they trace the curse denounced by Odin against the great oppressor, Rome! Once these words made part of the worship of our fathers; the worship has long since vanished, but the words remain; they seal the eternal hatred of the people of the north to the people of the south; they contain the spirit of the great destiny that has brought me to the walls of Rome. Citizen of a falling empire, the measure of your crimes is full! The voice of a new nation calls through me for the freedom of the earth, which was made for man, and not for Romans! The rule that your ancestors won by strength, their posterity shall no longer keep by fraud. For two hundred years, hollow and unlasting truces have alternated with long and bloody wars between your people and mine. Remembering this, remembering the wrongs of the Goths in their settlements in Thrace, the murder of the Gothic youths in the towns of Asia, the massacre of the Gothic hostages in Aquileia, I come—chosen by the supernatural decrees of heaven—to assure the freedom and satisfy

the wrath of my nation, by humbling at its feet the power of tyrannic Rome ! It is not for battle and bloodshed that I am encamped before yonder walls. It is to crush to the earth, by famine and woe, the pride of your people and the spirit of your rulers ; to tear from you your hidden wealth, and to strip you of your boasted honour ; to overthrow by oppression the oppressors of the world ; to deny you the glories of a resistance, and to impose on you the shame of a submission. It is for this that I now abstain from storming your city, to encircle it with an immovable blockade !”

As the declaration of his great mission burst thus from the lips of the Gothic king, the spirit of his lofty ambition seemed to diffuse itself over his outward form. His noble stature, his fine proportions, his commanding features, became invested with a simple, primeval grandeur. Contrasted as he now was with the shrunken figure of the spirit-broken stranger, he looked almost sublime.

A succession of protracted shudderings ran through the Pagan’s frame, but he neither wept nor spoke. The unavailing defence of the Temple

of Serapis, the defeated revolution at Alexandria, and the abortive intrigue with Vetricio, were now rising on his memory, to heighten the horror of his present and worst overthrow. Every circumstance connected with his desperate passage through the rifted wall revived, fearfully vivid, on his mind. He remembered all the emotions of his first night's labour in the darkness, all the miseries of his second night's torture under the fallen brick-work, all the woe, danger, and despondency, that accompanied his subsequent toil—persevered in under the obstructions of a famine-weakened body, and a helpless arm—until he passed, in delusive triumph, the last of the hindrances in the long-laboured breach. One after another, these banished recollections returned to his memory, as he listened to Alaric's rebuking words,—opening old wounds, reviving past infirmities, inflicting new lacerations. But, saving in the shudderings that still shook his body, no outward witness betrayed the inward torment that assailed him. It was too strong for human words; too terrible for human sympathy;—he suffered it in brute silence. Monstrous as was

his plot, the moral punishment of its attempted consummation was severe enough to be worthy of the projected crime.

After watching the man for a few minutes more, with a glance of pitiless disdain, Alaric summoned one of the warriors in attendance; and, having previously commanded him to pass the word to the sentinels, authorising the stranger's free passage through the encampment, he then turned; and, for the last time, addressed him as follows:—

“Return to Rome, through the hole whence, reptile-like, you emerged!—and feed your starving citizens with the words you have heard in the barbarian's tent!”

The guard approached, led him from the presence of the king, issued the necessary directions to the sentinels, and left him to himself. Once he raised his eyes in despairing appeal to the heaven that frowned over his head; but still, no word, or tear, or groan, escaped him. He moved slowly on, through the thick darkness; and, turning his back on the city, passed, careless whither he strayed, into the streets of the desolate and dispeopled suburbs.

CHAPTER III.



LOVE MEETINGS.

Who that has looked on a threatening and tempestuous sky, has not felt the pleasure of discovering unexpectedly a small spot of serene blue, still shining among the stormy clouds? The more unwillingly the eye has wandered over the gloomy expanse of the rest of the firmament, the more gladly does it finally rest on the little oasis of light which meets at length its weary gaze, and which, when it was dispersed over the whole heaven, was perhaps only briefly regarded with a careless glance. Contrasted with the dark and mournful hues around it, even that small spot of blue gradually acquires the power of investing the wider and sadder prospect with a certain interest and animation that it did not before possess—until the mind recognises in the

surrounding atmosphere of storm, an object adding variety to the view—a spectacle whose mournfulness may interest as well as repel.

With such sensations as these—applied directly to the mind only, instead of the eye—did we trace the few pages closing the final Chapter of the First Book. The happiness there described appeared to beam through the stormy progress of our narrative, as the spot of blue beams through the obscurity of the gathering clouds. It arose like a garden of rest, after the waste of fierce emotions that had encompassed us in the preceding pages. It encouraged us to enter on the field of gloomier interest, which we knew was to succeed it; and which would thus invite us by its variety, as contrasted with what had gone before, instead of saddening us by a monotony of woe.

Does the reader remember the scene at the farmhouse beyond the suburbs, with such emotions as these? If it has thus affected him, he will not now deny us an instant's digression from Ulpian and the city of famine, to Antonina and the lonely plains.

During the period that has elapsed since we left

her, Antonina has remained secure in her solitude; happy in her well-chosen concealment. The few straggling Goths who at rare intervals appeared in the neighbourhood of her sanctuary, never intruded on its peaceful limits. The sight of the ravaged fields and emptied granaries of the deserted little property, sufficed invariably to turn their marauding steps in other directions. Day by day ran smoothly and swiftly onward for the gentle usurper of the abandoned farm-house. In the narrow round of its gardens and protecting woods, was comprised for her the whole circle of the pleasures and occupations of her new life.

The simple stores left in the house, the fruits and vegetables to be gathered in the garden, sufficed amply for her support. The pastoral solitude of the place had in it a quiet, dreamy fascination; a novelty; an unwearying charm;—after the austere loneliness to which her former existence had been subjected in Rome. And, when evening came, and the sun began to burnish the tops of the western trees, then, after the calm emotions of the solitary day, came the hour of absorbing cares and happy

expectations—ever the same, yet ever delighting and ever new. Then the rude shutters were carefully closed ; the open door was shut and barred ; the small light—now invisible to the world without—was joyfully kindled ; and then, the mistress and author of these preparations resigned herself to await, with pleased anxiety, the approach of the guest for whose welcome they were designed.

And never did she expect the arrival of that treasured companion in vain. Hermanric remembered his promise to repair constantly to the farmhouse, and performed it with all the constancy of love, and all the enthusiasm of youth. When the sentinels under his command were arranged in their order of watching for the night, and the trust reposed in him by his superiors exempted his actions from superintendence during the hours of darkness that followed, he left the camp, passed through the desolate suburbs, and gained the dwelling where the young Roman awaited him—returning before day-break to receive the communications regularly addressed to him, at that hour, by his inferior in the command.

Thus, false to his nation, yet true to the new Egeria of his thoughts and actions—traitor to the requirements of vengeance and war, yet faithful to the interests of tranquillity and love—did he seek, night after night, Antonina's presence. His passion, though it denied him to his warrior-duties, wrought no deteriorating change in his disposition. All that it altered in him, it altered nobly. It varied and exalted his rude emotions; for it was inspired, not alone by the beauty and youth that he *saw*, but by the pure thoughts, the artless eloquence that he *heard*. And *she*—the forsaken daughter, the source whence the northern warrior derived those new and higher sensations that had never animated him until now—regarded her protector, her first friend and companion as her first love, with a devotion which, in its mingled and exalted nature may be imagined by the mind, but can be but imperfectly depicted by the pen. It was a devotion created of innocence and gratitude, of joy and sorrow, of apprehension and hope. It was too fresh, too unworldly, to own any upbraidings of artificial shame, any self-reproaches of artificial propriety. It resembled in

its essence, though not in its application, the devotion of the first daughters of the Fall to their brother-lords.

But what avails it that we still linger over such delineations as these? The higher passions, in their fullest strength and action, appeal to the human imagination, and scorn the homely interpretation of human words. The balance of good and evil in the loves of Hermanric and Antonina, will be better weighed by the heart of the reader than by the pen of the writer. Let their ages, their positions, and their opportunities be first considered, and then let Fancy work within the limits of the broad outline we have already provided, colouring it richly with the various glow of the lover's passionate words, brightening it with the brilliant lights of their moments of rapturous bliss, sobering it with the soft shadows of their hours of luxurious repose. So shall the love-scenes at the farm-house answer the expectations of all, and—happier destiny still—offend the prejudices of none!

For ourselves, it is now time that we return to the course of our narrative; although, ere we again

enter on the stirring and rapid present, it will be necessary for a moment more, to look back in another direction, to the eventful past.

But it is not on peace, beauty, and pleasure, that our observation now fixes itself. It is to anger, disease, and crime—to the unappeasable and unwomanly Goisvintha, that we now revert.

Since the day when the violence of her conflicting emotions had deprived her of consciousness, at the moment of her decisive triumph over the scruples of Hermanric and the destiny of Antonina, a raging fever had visited on her some part of those bitter sufferings that she would fain have inflicted on others. Part of the time she lay in a raving delirium ; part of the time in helpless exhaustion ; but she never forgot, whatever the form assumed by her disease, the desperate purpose in the pursuit of which she had first incurred it. Slowly and doubtfully, her vigour at length returned to her, and with it strengthened and increased the fierce ambition of vengeance that absorbed her lightest thoughts, and governed her most careless actions.

Report informed her of the new position, in the

line of blockade, on which Hermanric was posted ; and only enumerated as the companions of his sojourn, the warriors sent thither under his command. But, though thus persuaded of the separation of Antonina and the Goth, her ignorance of the girl's fate rankled unintermittingly in her savage heart. Doubtful whether she had permanently reclaimed Hermanric to the interests of vengeance and bloodshed, vaguely suspecting that he might have informed himself in her absence of Antonina's place of refuge, or direction of flight ; still resolutely bent on securing the death of her victim, wherever she might have strayed, she awaited with trembling eagerness that day of restoration to available activity and strength, which would enable her to resume her influence over the Goth, and her machinations against the safety of the fugitive girl. The time of her final and long expected recovery, was the very day preceding the stormy night we have already described, and her first employment of her renewed energy, was to send word to the young Goth of her intention of seeking him at his encampment ere the evening closed.

It was this intimation which caused the inquietude mentioned as characteristic of the manner of Hermanric, at the commencement of the preceding chapter. The evening there described, was the first that saw him deprived, through the threatened visit of Goisvintha, of the anticipation of repairing to Antonina, as had been his wont, under cover of the night ; for to slight his kinswoman's ominous message, was to risk the most fatal of discoveries. Trusting to the delusive security of her sickness, he had hitherto banished the unwelcome remembrance of her existence from his thoughts. But, now that she was once more capable of exertion and of crime, he felt that if he would preserve the secret of Antonina's hiding-place and the security of Antonina's life, he must remain to oppose force to force, and stratagem to stratagem, when Goisvintha sought him at his post, even at the risk of inflicting by his absence from the farm-house, all the pangs of anxiety and apprehension on the lonely girl.

Absorbed in such reflections as these ; longing to depart, yet determined to remain, he impatiently

awaited Goisvintha's approach, until the rising of the storm with its mysterious and all-engrossing train of events, forced his thoughts and actions into a new channel. When, however, his interviews with the stranger and the Gothic king were past, and he had returned as he had been bidden to his appointed sojourn in the camp, his old anxieties, displaced but not destroyed, resumed their influence over him. He demanded eagerly of his comrades if Goisvintha had arrived in his absence ; and received the same answer in the negative from each.

As he now listened to the melancholy rising of the wind ; to the increasing loudness of the thunder ; to the shrill cries of the distant night-birds hurrying to shelter, emotions of mournfulness and awe possessed themselves of his heart. He now wondered that any events, however startling, however appalling, should have had the power to turn his mind for a moment, from the dreary contemplations that had engaged it at the close of day. He thought of Antonina, solitary and helpless, listening to the tempest in affright, and watching vainly for his long-delayed approach. His fancy arrayed

before him dangers, plots, and crimes, robed in all the horrible exaggerations of a dream. Even the quick monotonous dripping of the rain-drops outside, aroused within him dark and indefinable forebodings of ill. The passion that had hitherto created for him new pleasures, was now fulfilling the other half of its earthly mission, and causing him new pains.

As the storm strengthened ; as the slow moments marched heavily and dismally onward ; as the darkness lowered deeper and deeper, so did his inquietude increase, until at length it mastered the last feeble resistance of his wavering firmness. Persuading himself that after having delayed so long, Goisvintha would now refrain from seeking him until the morrow ; and that all communications from Alaric, had they been despatched, would have reached him ere this ; unable any longer to combat his anxiety for the safety of Antonina ; determined to risk the worst possibilities, rather than be absent at such a time of tempest and peril from the farm-house, he made a last visit to the stations of the watchful sentinels, and quitted the camp for the night.

CHAPTER IV.

THE HUNS.

MORE than an hour after Hermanric had left the encampment, a man hurriedly entered the house set apart for the young chieftain's occupation. He made no attempt to kindle either light or fire, but sat down in the principal apartment, occasionally whispering to himself in a strange and barbarous tongue.

He had remained but a short time in possession of his comfortless solitude, when he was intruded on by a camp follower, bearing a small lamp, and followed closely by a woman, who, as he started up and confronted her, announced herself as Hermanric's kinswoman, and eagerly demanded an interview with the Goth.

Haggard and ghastly though it was from recent

suffering and long agitation, the countenance of Goisvintha (for it was she) appeared absolutely attractive, as it was now opposed by the lamp-light to the face and figure of the individual she addressed. A flat nose, a swarthy complexion, long, coarse, tangled locks of deep black hair, a beardless retreating chin, and small, savage, sunken eyes, gave a character almost bestial to this man's physiognomy. His broad, brawny shoulders overhung a form that was as low in stature as it was athletic in build; you looked on him and saw the sinews of a giant strung in the body of a dwarf. And yet this deformed Hercules was no solitary error of Nature—no extraordinary exception to his fellow-beings; but the actual type of a whole race, stunted and repulsive as himself. He was a Hun.

This savage people, the terror even of their barbarous neighbours, living without government, laws, or religion, possessed but one feeling in common with the human race—the instinct of war. Their historical career may be said to have begun with their early conquests in China, and to have proceeded in their first victories over the Goths, who

regarded them as demons, and fled their approach. The hostilities thus commenced between the two nations, were at length suspended by the temporary alliance of the conquered people with the empire, and subsequently ceased in the gradual fusion of the interests of each, in one animating spirit—detestation of Rome.

By this bond of brotherhood, the Goths and the Huns became publicly united, though still privately at enmity—for the one nation remembered its former defeats, as vividly as the other remembered its former victories. With various disasters, dissensions, and successes, they ran their career of battle and rapine—sometimes separate, sometimes together; until the period of our romance, when Alaric's besieging forces numbered among the ranks of their barbarian auxiliaries a body of Huns, who, unwillingly admitted to the title of Gothic allies, were dispersed about the army in subordinate stations, and of whom, the individual above described was one of those contemptuously favoured by promotion to an inferior command, under Hermanric, as a Gothic chief.

An expression of aversion, but not of terror, passed over Goisvintha's worn features as she approached the barbarian, and repeated her desire to be conducted to Hermanric's presence. For the second time, however, the man gave her no answer. He burst into a shrill, short laugh, and shook his huge shoulders in clumsy derision.

The woman's cheek reddened for an instant, and then turned again to livid paleness, as she thus resumed :—

“ I came not hither to be mocked by a barbarian, but to be welcomed by a Goth ! Again I ask you, where is my kinsman, Hermanric ? ”

“ Gone ! ”—cried the Hun. And his laughter grew more wild and discordant as he spoke.

A sudden tremor ran through Goisvintha's frame, as she marked the manner of the barbarian and heard his reply. Repressing with difficulty her anger and agitation, she continued, with apprehension in her eyes and entreaty in her tones :—

“ Whither has he gone ? Wherefore has he departed ?—I know that the hour I appointed for

our meeting here has long passed ; but I have suffered a sickness of many weeks ; and when, at evening, I prepared to set forth, my banished infirmities seemed suddenly to return to me again. I was borne to my bed. But, though the women who succoured me bid me remain and repose, I found strength in the night to escape them, and through storm and darkness to come hither alone—for I was determined, though I should perish for it, to seek the presence of Hermanric, as I had promised by my messengers. You, that are the companion of his watch, must know whither he is gone. Go to him, and tell him what I have spoken. I will await his return !”

“His business is secret,” sneered the Hun. “He has departed, but without telling me whither. How should I, that am a barbarian, know the whereabouts of an illustrious Goth ? It is not for me to know his actions, but to obey his words !”

“Jeer not about your obedience”—returned Goisvintha, with breathless eagerness—“I say to you again, you know whither he is gone, and you must tell me for what he has departed.

You obey *him*—there is money to make you obey *me* ! ”

“ When I said his business was secret, I lied not,” said the Hun, picking up with avidity the coins she flung to him—“ but he has not kept it secret from *me* ! The Huns are cunning ! Aha, ugly and cunning ! ”

Suspicion, the only refined emotion in a criminal heart, half discovered to Goisvintha, at this moment, the intelligence that was yet to be communicated. No word, however, escaped her, while she signed to the barbarian to proceed.

“ He has gone to a farm house on the plains beyond the suburbs behind us. He will not return till day-break,” continued the Hun, tossing his money carelessly in his great, horny hands.

“ Did you *see* him go ? ” gasped the woman.

“ I tracked him to the house,” returned the barbarian. “ For many nights I watched and suspected him—to-night I saw him depart. It is but a short time since I returned from following him. The darkness did not delude me ; the place is on the high road from the suburbs—the first

bye-path to the westward leads to its garden gate. —I know it ! I have discovered his secret ! I am more cunning than he !”

“For what did he seek the farm-house at night ?” demanded Goisvintha after an interval, during which she appeared to be silently fixing the man’s last speech in her memory, “Are you cunning enough to tell me that ?”

“For what do men venture their safety and their lives ; their money and their renown ?” laughed the barbarian. “They venture them for women ! There is a girl at the farm-house ; I saw her at the door when the chief went in !”

He paused ; but Goisvintha made no answer. Remembering that she was descended from a race of women who slew their wounded husbands, brothers, and sons with their own hands, when they sought them after battle, dishonoured by a defeat ; remembering that the fire of the old ferocity of such ancestors as these still burnt at her heart ; remembering all that she had hoped from Hermanric, and had plotted against Antonina ; estimating in all its importance the shock of the

intelligence she now received, we are alike unwilling and unable to describe her emotions at this moment. For some time, the stillness in the room was interrupted by no sounds but the rolling of the thunder without ; the quick, convulsive respiration of Goisvintha ; and the clinking of the money which the Hun still continued to toss mechanically from hand to hand.

“ I shall reap good harvest of gold and silver after to-night’s work,” pursued the barbarian, suddenly breaking the silence. “ *You* have given me money to speak—when the chief returns and hears that I have discovered him, *he* will give me money to be silent. I shall drink to-morrow with the best men in the army, Hun though I am ! ”

He returned to his seat as he ceased, and began beating in monotonous measure, with one of his pieces of money on the blade of his sword, some chorus of a favourite drinking song ; while Goisvintha, standing pale and breathless near the door of the chamber, looked down on him with fixed vacant eyes. At length a deep sigh broke

from her; her hands involuntarily clenched themselves at her side; her lips moved with a bitter smile; then, without addressing another word to the Hun, she turned, and softly and stealthily quitted the room.

The instant she was gone, a sudden change arose in the barbarian's manner. He started from his seat, a scowl of savage hatred and triumph appeared on his shaggy brows, and he paced to and fro through the chamber like a wild beast in his cage. "I shall tear him from the pinnacle of his power *at last!*" he whispered fiercely to himself. "For what I have told her this night, his kinswoman will hate him—I knew it while she spoke! For his desertion of his post, Alaric may dishonour him; may banish him; may hang him! His fate is at my mercy; I shall rid myself nobly of him and his commands! More than all the rest of his nation I loathe this Goth! I will be by when they drag him to the tree, and taunt him with his shame, as he has taunted me with my deformity." Here he paused to laugh in complacent approval of his project, quickening his steps and

hugging himself joyfully in the barbarous exhilaration of his triumph.

His secret meditations had thus occupied him for some time longer, when the sound of a footstep was audible outside the door. He recognised it instantly, and called softly to the person without to approach. At the signal of his voice a man entered—less athletic in build, but in deformity the very counterpart of himself. The following discourse was then immediately held between the two Huns, the new-comer beginning it thus :—

“ Have you tracked him to the door ? ”

“ To the very threshold.”

“ Then his downfall is assured ! I have seen Alaric.”

“ We shall trample him under our feet !—this boy, who has been set over us that are his elders, because he is a Goth and we are Huns ! But what of Alaric ? How did you gain his ear ? ”

“ The Goths round his tent, scoffed at me as a savage, and swore that I was begotten between a demon and a witch. But I remembered the time when these boasters fled from their settlements ;

when our tribes mounted their black steeds and hunted them like beasts! Aha, their very lips were pale with fear in those days.”

“Speak of Alaric—our time is short;” interrupted the other fiercely.

“I answered not a word to their taunts,” resumed his companion, “but I called out loudly that I was a Gothic ally; that I brought messages to Alaric; and that I had the privilege of audience like the rest. My voice reached the ears of the king; he looked forth from his tent, and beckoned me in. I saw his hatred of my nation lowering in his eye as we looked on one another, but I spoke with submission and in a soft voice. I told him how his chieftain whom he had set over us, secretly deserted his post; I told him how we had seen his favoured warrior for many nights, journeying towards the suburbs; how on this night, as on others before, he had stolen from the encampment, and how you had gone forth to track him to his lurking-place.”

“Was the tyrant angered?”

“His cheeks reddened, and his eyes flashed, and

his fingers trembled round the hilt of his sword while I spoke! When I ceased, he answered me that I lied. He cursed me for an infidel Hun, who had slandered a Christian chieftain. He threatened me with hanging! I cried to him to send messengers to our quarters to prove the truth, ere he slew me. He commanded a warrior to return hither with me. When we arrived, the most Christian chieftain was nowhere to be beheld—none knew whither he had gone! We turned back again to the tent of the king; his warrior whom he honoured, spoke the same words to him as the Hun whom he despised. Then the wrath of Alaric rose. ‘This very night,’ he cried, ‘did I with my own lips direct him to await my commands with vigilance at his appointed post! I would visit such disobedience with punishment on my own son! Go, take with you others of your troop—your comrade who has tracked him will guide you to his hiding-place—bring him prisoner into my tent!’ Such were his words! Our companions wait us without—lest he should escape us let us depart without delay.”

“ And if he should resist us,” cried the other, leading the way eagerly towards the door ; “ what said the king, if he should resist us ? ”

“ Slay him with your own hands ! ”

CHAPTER V.



THE FARM HOUSE.

As the night still advanced, so did the storm increase. On the plains in the open country its violence was most apparent. Here no living voices jarred with the dreary music of the elements ; no flaming torches opposed the murky darkness, or imitated the glaring lightning. The thunder pursued uninterruptedly its tempest symphony, and the fierce wind joined it, swelling into wild harmony, when it rushed through the trees, as if in their waving branches it struck the chords of a mighty harp.

In the small chamber of the farm-house sat together Hermanric and Antonina, listening in speechless attention to the increasing tumult of the storm.

The room and its occupants were imperfectly

illuminated by the flame of a smouldering wood fire. The little earthenware lamp hung from its usual place in the ceiling, but its oil was exhausted, and its light was extinct. A vase of fruit lay broken by the side of the table, from which it had fallen unnoticed to the floor. No other articles of ornament or furniture appeared in the apartment. Hermanric's downcast eyes and melancholy unchanging expression, betrayed the gloomy abstraction in which he was absorbed. With one hand clasped in his, and the other resting with her head on his shoulder, Antonina listened with fixed attention to the alternate rising and falling of the wind. Her beauty had grown fresher and more woman-like during her sojourn at the farm-house. Cheerfulness and hope seemed to have gained, at length, all the share in her being assigned to them by nature at her birth. Even at this moment of tempest and darkness, there was more of wonder and awe, than of agitation and affright in her expression, as she sat hearkening, with flushed cheek and brightened eye, to the progress of the storm without.

Thus engrossed by their thoughts, Hermanric and Antonina remained silent in their little retreat, until the reveries of both were suddenly interrupted by the snapping asunder of the bar of wood which secured the door of the room, the stress of which, as it bent under the repeated shocks of the wind, the rotten spar was too weak to sustain any longer. There was something inexpressibly desolate in the flood of rain, wind, and darkness that seemed instantly to pour into the chamber, through the open door, as it flew back violently on its frail hinges. Antonina changed colour, and shuddered involuntarily, as Hermanric hastily rose and closed the door again, by detaching its rude latch from the sling which held it when not wanted for use. He looked round the room as he did so, for some substitute for the broken bar, but nothing that was fit for the purpose immediately met his eye, and he muttered to himself as he returned impatiently to his seat, "While we are here to watch it the latch is enough: it is new and strong."

He seemed on the point of again relapsing into his former gloom, when the voice of Antonina arrested

his attention, and aroused him for the moment from his thoughts.

“Is it in the power of the tempest to make *you*, a warrior of a race of heroes, thus sorrowful and sad?” she asked, in accents of gentle reproach. “Even I, as I look on these walls that are so eloquent of my happiness, and sit by you whose presence makes that happiness, can listen to the raging storm, and feel no heaviness over my heart! What is there to either of us in the tempest, that should oppress us with gloom? Does not the thunder of the winter night come from the same heaven as the sunshine of the summer day? You are so young, so generous, so brave,—you have loved, and pitied, and succoured *me*,—why should the night-language of the sky cast such sorrow and such silence over *you*?”

“It is not from sorrow that I am silent,” replied Hermanric, with a constrained smile, “but from weariness with much toil in the camp.”

He stifled a sigh as he spoke. His head returned to its old downcast position. The struggle between his assumed carelessness and his real inquietude

was evidently unequal. As she looked fixedly on him, with the vigilant eye of affection, the girl's countenance saddened with his. She nestled closer to his side, and resumed the discourse in anxious and entreating tones.

“It is haply the strife between our two nations which has separated us already, and may separate us again, that thus oppresses you,” said she, “but think, as I do, of the peace that must come, and not of the warfare that now is. Think of the pleasures of our past days, and of the happiness of our present moments,—thus united, thus living, loving, hoping for each other; and, like me, you will doubt not of the future that is in preparation for us both! The season of tranquillity may return with the season of spring. The serene heaven will then be reflected on a serene country and a happy people; and in those days of sunshine and peace, will any hearts among all the glad population be more joyful than ours?”

She paused a moment. Some sudden thought or recollection heightened her colour and caused her to hesitate ere she proceeded. She was about

at length to continue, when a peal of thunder, louder than any which had preceded it, burst threateningly over the house and drowned the first accents of her voice. The wind moaned loudly ; the rain splashed against the door ; the latch rattled long and sharply in its socket. Once more Hermanric rose from his seat, and approaching the fire, placed a fresh log of wood upon the dying embers. His dejection seemed now to communicate itself to Antonina, and as he reseated himself by her side, she did not address him again.

Thoughts dreary and appalling beyond any that had occupied it before, were rising in the mind of the Goth. His inquietude at the encampment in the suburbs was tranquillity itself, compared to the gloom which now oppressed him. All the evaded dues of his nation, his family, and his calling ; all the suppressed recollections of the martial occupations he had slighted, and the martial enmities he had disowned, now revived avengingly in his memory. Yet, vivid as these remembrances were, they weakened none of those feelings of passionate devotion to Antonina, by which their influence

within him had hitherto been overcome. They existed with them—the old recollections with the new emotions—the stern rebukings of the warrior's nature with the anxious forebodings of the lover's heart. And now, his mysterious meeting with Ulpius; Goisvintha's unexpected restoration to health; the dreary rising and furious progress of the night tempest, began to impress his superstitious mind as a train of unwonted and meaning incidents, destined to mark the fatal return of his kinswoman's influence over his own actions and Antonina's fate.

One by one, his memory revived with laborious minuteness every incident that had attended his different interviews with the Roman girl, from the first night when she had strayed into his tent to the last happy evening that he had spent with her at the deserted farm-house. Then tracing further backwards the course of his existence, he figured to himself his meeting with Goisvintha among the Italian Alps; his presence at the death of her last child, and his solemn engagement, on hearing her recital of the massacre at Aquileia, to avenge her

on the Romans with his own hands. Roused by these opposite pictures of the past, his imagination peopled the future with images of Antonina again endangered, afflicted, and forsaken ; with visions of the impatient army, spurred at length into ferocious action, making universal havoc among the people of Rome, and forcing him back for ever into their avenging ranks. No decision for resistance or resignation to flight presented itself to his judgment. Doubt, despair, and apprehension held unimpeded sway over his impressible, but inactive faculties. The night itself, as he looked forth on it, was not more dark ; the wild thunder, as he listened to it, not more gloomy ; the name of Goisvintha, as he thought on it, not more ominous of evil, than the sinister visions that now startled his imagination, and oppressed his weary mind.

There was something indescribably simple, touching, and eloquent in the very positions of Hermanric and Antonina as they now sat together,—the only members of their respective nations who were united in affection and peace,—in the lonely farm-house. Both the girl's hands were clasped

over Hermanric's shoulder, and her head rested on them, turned from the door towards the interior of the room, and so displaying her rich, black hair in all its luxuriance. The head of the Goth was still sunk on his breast as though he were wrapped in a deep sleep, and his hands rested listlessly side by side on the scabbard of his sheathed sword, which lay across his knees. The fire flamed only at intervals, the fresh log that had been placed on it not having been thoroughly kindled as yet. Sometimes the light played on the white folds of Antonina's dress; sometimes over the bright surface of Hermanric's cuirass, which he had removed and laid by his side on the ground; sometimes over his sword, and his hands, as they rested on it; but it was not sufficiently powerful or lasting to illuminate the room, the walls and corners of which it left in almost complete darkness.

The thunder still pealed from without, but the rain and wind had partially lulled. The night hours had moved on more swiftly than our narrative of the events that marked them. It was now midnight.

No sound within the room reached Antonina's ear but the quick rattling of the door latch, shaken in its socket by the wind. As one by one the moments journeyed slowly onward, it made its harsh music with as monotonous a regularity as though it were moved by their progress, and kept pace with their eternal march. Gradually the girl found herself listening to this sharp, discordant sound, with all the attention she could have bestowed at other times on the ripple of a distant rivulet, or the soothing harmony of a lute, when, just as it seemed adapting itself most easily to her senses, it suddenly ceased, and the next instant a gust of wind, like that which had rushed through the open door on the breaking of its rotten bar, waved her hair about her face, and fluttered the folds of her light, loose dress. She raised her head and whispered tremulously to Hermanric ;—

“ The door is again open—the latch has given way! ”

The Goth started from his reverie, and looked up hastily. At that instant the rattling of the latch recommenced as suddenly as it had ceased,

and the air of the room recovered its former tranquillity.

“Calm yourself, beloved one,” said Hermanric gently; “your fancy has misled you—the door is safe.”

He parted back her dishevelled hair caressingly as he spoke. Incapable of doubting the lightest word that fell from his lips, and hearing no suspicious or unwonted sound in the room, she never attempted to justify her suspicions. As she again rested her head on his shoulder, a vague misgiving oppressed her heart, and drew from her an irrepressible sigh; but she gave her apprehensions no expression in words. After listening for a moment more to assure himself of the security of the latch, the Goth resumed insensibly the contemplations from which he had been disturbed; once more his head drooped, and again his hands returned mechanically to their old listless position, side by side, on the scabbard of his sword.

The faint, fickle flames still rose and fell, gleaming here and sinking there, the latch sounded sharply in its socket, the thunder yet uttered its

surly peal, but the wind was now subsiding into fainter moans, and the rain began to splash faintly and more faintly against the shutters without. To the watchers in the farmhouse nothing was altered to the eye, and little to the ear. Fatal security ! The last few minutes had darkly determined their future destinies—in their loved and cherished retreat they were now no longer alone.

They heard no stealthy footstep pacing round their dwelling, they saw no fierce eyes peering into the interior of the farmhouse through a chink in the shutters, they marked no dusky figure passing through the softly and quickly opened door, and gliding into the darkest corner of the room. Yet, now as they sat together, communing in silence with their young, sad hearts, the threatening figure of Goisvintha stood, shrouded in congenial darkness, under their protecting roof, and in their beloved chamber, rising still and silent almost at their very sides.

Though the fire of her past fever had raged again through her veins, though startling visions of the murders at Aquileia had flashed before her mind

as the wild lightning before her eyes, she had traced her way through the suburbs and along the high road, and down the little path to the farmhouse gate, without straying, without hesitating. Regardless of the darkness and the storm, she had prowled about the house, had raised the latch, had waited for a loud peal of thunder ere she passed the door, and had stolen shadow-like into the darkest corner of the room, with a patience and a determination that nothing could disturb. And now, when she stood at the goal of her worst wishes, even now, when she looked down upon the two beings by whom she had been thwarted and deceived, her fierce self-possession did not desert her; her lips quivered over her locked teeth, her bosom heaved beneath her drenched garments, but neither sighs nor curses, not even a smile of triumph or a movement of anger escaped her.

She never looked at Antonina; her eyes wandered not for a moment from Hermanric's form. The quickest, faintest gleam of firelight that played over it, was followed through its fitful course by her eager glance, rapid and momentary as itself. Soon

her attention fixed wholly upon his hands, as they lay over the scabbard of his sword; and then, slowly and obscurely, a new and fatal resolution sprung up within her. The various emotions pictured in her face became resolved into one sinister expression, and, without removing her eyes from the Goth, she slowly drew from the bosom-folds of her garment a long sharp knife.

The flames alternately trembled into light and subsided into darkness as at first; Hermanric and Antonina yet continued in their old positions, absorbed in their thoughts and in themselves; and still Goisvintha remained unmoved as ever, knife in hand, watchful, steady, silent as before.

But beneath the concealment of her outward tranquillity, raged a contention under which her mind darkened and her heart writhed. Twice she returned the knife to its former hiding-place, and twice she drew it forth again; her cheeks grew paler and paler, she pressed her clenched hand convulsively over her bosom, and leant back languidly against the wall behind her. No thought of Antonina had part in this strife of secret emotions;

her wrath had too much of anguish in it to be wrath against a stranger and an enemy.

After the lapse of a few moments more, her strength returned—her firmness was aroused. The last traces of grief and despair that had hitherto appeared in her eyes, vanished from them in an instant. Rage, vengeance, ferocity, lowered over them as she crept stealthily forward to the very side of the Goth; and—when the next gleam of fire played upon him—drew the knife fiercely across the backs of his hands. The cut was true, strong, and rapid—it divided the tendons from first to last—he was crippled for life.

At that instant the fire touched the very heart of the log that had been laid on it. It crackled gaily; it blazed out brilliantly. The whole room was as brightly illuminated as if a Christmas festival of ancient England had been preparing within its walls!

The warm, cheerful light, showed the Goth the figure of his assassin, ere the first cry of anguish had died away on his lips, or the first start of irrepressible horror ceased to vibrate through his

frame. The cries of his hapless companion, as the whole scene of vengeance, treachery, and mutilation, flashed, in one terrible instant, before her eyes, seemed not even to reach his ears. Once he looked down upon his helpless hands, when the sword rolled heavily from them to the floor. Then his gaze directed itself immovably upon Goisvintha, as she stood at a little distance from him, with her blood-stained knife, silent as himself.

There was no fury—no defiance—not even the passing distortion of physical suffering in his features, as he now looked on her. Blank, rigid horror—tearless, voiceless, helpless despair, seemed to have petrified the expression of his face into an everlasting form, unyouthful and unhopeful—as if he had been imprisoned from his childhood, and a voice was now taunting him with the pleasures of liberty, from a grating in his dungeon walls. Not even when Antonina, recovering from her first agony of terror, pressed her convulsive kisses on his cold cheek, entreating him to look on her, did he turn his head, or remove his eyes from Goisvintha's form.

At length, the deep, steady accents of the

woman's voice were heard through the desolate silence.

“Traitor in word and thought you may be yet—but traitor in deed you never more shall be!”—she began, pointing to his hands with her knife. “Those hands that have protected a Roman life, shall never grasp a Roman sword—never pollute again by their touch a Gothic weapon!—I remembered, as I watched you in the darkness, how the women of my race once punished their recreant warriors, when they fled to them from a defeat—So have I punished *you*! The arm that served not the cause of brother and brother's children—of king and king's nation—shall serve no other! I am half avenged of the murders at Aquileia, now that I am avenged on *you*! Go, fly with the Roman you have chosen, to the city of her people! Your life as a warrior is at an end!”

He made her no answer. There are emotions—the last of a life—which tear back from nature the strongest barriers that custom raises to repress her, which betray the lurking existence of the first rude social feeling of the primeval days of a great

nation, in the breasts of their most distant descendants, however widely their acquirements, their prosperities, and their changes may seem to have morally separated them from their ancestors of old. Such were the emotions now awakened in the heart of the Goth. His Christianity, his love, his knowledge of high aims, and his experience of new ideas, sank and deserted him, as though he had never known them. He thought on his mutilated hands, and no other spirit moved within him, but the ancient Gothic spirit of centuries back; the inspiration of his nation's early northern songs, and early northern achievements—the renown of courage, and the supremacy of strength.

Vainly did Antonina, in the midst of the despair that still possessed her, yearn for a word from his lips, or a glance from his eyes; vainly did her trembling fingers—tearing the bandages from her robe—stanch the blood on his wounded hands; vainly did her voice call on him to fly and summon help from his companions in the camp! His mind was far away, brooding over the legends of the battle-fields of his ancestors, remembering how, even

in the day of victory, they slew themselves if they were crippled in the fray, how they scorned to exist for other interests than the interests of strife, how they mutilated traitors as Goisvintha had mutilated *him* ! Such were the objects that enchained his inward faculties, while his outward senses were still enthralled by the horrible fascination that existed for him, in the presence of the assassin by his side. His very consciousness of his existence, though he moved and breathed, seemed to have ceased.

“ You thought to deceive me in my sickness, you hoped to profit by my death ”—resumed Goisvintha, returning contemptuously her victim’s glance.—“ You trusted in the night, and the darkness, and the storm—you were secure in your boldness, in your strength, in the secrecy of this lurking-place that you have chosen for your treachery ; but your stratagems and your expectations have failed you ! At Aquileia I learnt to be wily and watchful as you ! I discovered your desertion of the warriors and the camp ; I penetrated the paths to your hiding place ; I entered it as softly as I once departed from the dwelling where

my children were slain ! In my just vengeance I have treated *you* as treacherously as you would have treated *me* ! Remember your murdered brother ; remember the child I put into your arms wounded, and received from them dead ; remember your broken oaths and forgotten promises, and make to your nation, to your duties, and to *me*, the atonement—the last and the only one—that in my mercy I have left in your power—the atonement of death !”

Again she paused, and again no reply awaited her. Still the Goth neither moved nor spoke, and still Antonina—kneeling unconsciously upon the sword, now useless to him for ever—continued to stanch the blood on his hands with a mechanical earnestness, that seemed to shut out the contemplation of every other object from her eyes. The tears streamed incessantly down her cheeks ; but she never turned towards Goisvintha, never suspended her occupation.

Meanwhile, the fire still blazed noisily on the cheerful hearth ; but the storm, as if disdaining the office of heightening the human horror of the farm-house scene, was rapidly subsiding. The

thunder pealed less frequently and less loudly, the wind sunk into intervals of noiseless calm, and occasionally the moonlight streamed, in momentary brightness, through the ragged edges of the fast-breaking clouds. The breath of the still morning was already moving upon the firmament of the stormy night.

“Has life its old magic for you yet?” continued Goisvintha, in tones of pitiless reproach. “Have you forgotten, with the spirit of your people, the end for which your ancestors lived? Is not your sword at your feet? Is not the knife in my hand? Do not the waters of the Tiber, rolling yonder to the sea, offer to you the grave of oblivion that all may seek? Die then! In your last hour be a Goth; even to the Romans you are worthless now! Already your comrades have discovered your desertion; will you wait till you are hung for a rebel? Will you live to implore the mercy of your enemies; or, dishonoured and defenceless, will you endeavour to escape? You are of the blood of my family, but again I say it to you—die!”

His pale lips trembled ; he looked round for the first time at Antonina, but his utterance struggled ineffectually, even yet, against unyielding despair. He was still silent.

Goisvintha turned from him disdainfully, and approaching the fire sat down before it, bending her haggard features over the brilliant flames. For a few minutes, she remained absorbed in her evil thoughts, but no articulate word escaped her ; and when at length she again abruptly broke the silence, it was not to address the Goth, or to fix her eyes on him, as before.

Still cowering over the fire, apparently as regardless of the presence of the two beings whose happiness she had just crushed for ever, as if they had never existed ; she began to recite, in solemn, measured, chanting tones, a legend of the darkest and earliest age of Gothic history, keeping time to herself with the knife that she still held in her hand. The malignity in her expression, as she pursued her employment, betrayed the heartless motive that animated it, almost as eloquently as

the words of the composition she was repeating :
thus she now spoke :—

“The tempest-god’s pinions o’ershadow the sky,
The waves leap to welcome the storm that is nigh,
Through the hall of old Odin re-echo the shocks
That the fierce ocean hurls at his rampart of rocks,
As, alone on the crags that soar up from the sands,
With his virgin SIONA the young AGNAR stands ;
Tears sprinkle their dew on the sad maiden’s cheeks,
And the voice of the chieftain sinks low while he speaks :—

‘Crippled in the fight for ever ;
Number’d with the worse than slain ;
Weak, deform’d, disabled !—never
Can I join the hosts again !—
With the battle that is won
AGNAR’S earthly course is run !

‘When thy shatter’d frame must yield,
If thou seek’st a future field ;
When thy arm that sway’d the strife,
Fails to shield thy worthless life ;
When thy hands no more afford,
Full employment to the sword ;
Then, preserve—respect thy name ;
Meet thy death—to live is shame !
Such is Odin’s mighty will ;
Such commands I now fulfil ! ’ ”

At this point in the legend, she paused and turned suddenly to observe its effect on Hermanric. All its horrible application to himself thrilled through his heart. His head sank, and a low groan burst from his lips. But even this evidence

of the suffering she was inflicting failed to melt the iron malignity of Goisvintha's determination.

“Do you remember the death of Agnar?” she cried. “When you were a child, I sung it to you ere you slept, and you vowed as you heard it, that when you were a man, if you suffered *his* wounds you would die *his* death! *He* was crippled in a victory, yet he slew himself on the day of his triumph; *you* are crippled in your treachery, and have forgotten your boy's honour, and will live in the darkness of your shame! Have you lost remembrance of that ancient song? You heard it from me in the morning of your years; listen, and you shall hear it to the end, it is the dirge for your approaching death!”

She continued—

“‘SIOGA, mourn not!—where I go
The warriors feel nor pain nor woe;
They raise aloft the gleaming steel,
Their wounds yet warm, untended heal;
Their arrows bellow through the air
In showers, as they battle there;
In mighty cups their wine is pour'd,
Bright virgins throng their midnight board!
Yet think not that I die unmov'd;
I mourn the doom that sets me free,

As I think, betroth'd—belov'd,
On all the joys I lose in thee !
To form my boys to meet the fray,
Where'er the Gothic banner streams ;
To guard thy night, to glad thy day,
Made all the bliss of AGNAR'S dreams—
Dreams that must now be all forgot,
Earth's joys have passed from Agnar's lot !

'See, athwart the face of light,
Float the clouds of sullen Night !
Odin's warriors watch for me
By the earth-encircling sea !
The waters' dirges howl my knell ;
'Tis time I die—Farewell—Farewell !'

"He rose with a smile to prepare for the spring,
He flew from the rock like a bird on the wing ;
The sea met her prey with a leap and a roar,
And the maid stood alone by the wave-riven shore !
The winds mutter'd deep with a woe-boding sound,
As she wept o'er the footsteps he'd left on the ground ;
And the wild vultures shriek'd, for the chieftain who spread
Their battle-field banquets, was laid with the dead !"

As, with a slow and measured emphasis, Goisvintha pronounced the last lines of the poem, she again approached Hermanric. But the eyes of the Goth sought her no longer. She had calmed the emotions that she had hoped to irritate. Of the latter divisions of her legend, those only which were pathetic had arrested the lost chieftain's attention, and the blunted faculties of his heart

recovered their old refinement as he listened to them. A solemn composure of love, grief, and pity, appeared in the glance of affection that he now directed on the girl's despairing countenance. Years of good thoughts, an existence of tender cares, an eternity of youthful devotion, spoke in that rapt, momentary, eloquent gaze, and imprinted on his expression a character ineffably beautiful and calm—a nobleness above the human, and approaching the angelic and divine.

Intuitively, Goisvintha followed the direction of his eyes, and looked, like him, on the Roman girl's face. A lowering expression of hatred replaced the scorn that had hitherto distorted her passionate features. Mechanically, her hand again half raised the knife, and the accents of her wrathful voice once more disturbed the sacred silence of affection and grief.

“Is it for the girl there, that you would still live?” she cried sternly. “I foreboded it, coward, when I first looked on you! I prepared for it, when I wounded you! I made sure, that when my anger again threatened this new ruler of your

thoughts and mover of your actions, you should have lost the power to divert it from her again! Think you that because my disdain has delayed it, my vengeance on her is abandoned? Long since I swore to you that she should die, and I will hold to my purpose! I have punished *you*, I will slay *her*! Can you shield her from the blow to-night, as you shielded her in your tent? You are weaker before me than a child!"

She ceased abruptly, for at this moment a noise of hurrying footsteps and contending voices became suddenly audible from without. As she heard it a ghastly paleness chased the flush of anger from her cheeks. With the promptitude of apprehension she snatched the sword of Hermanric from under Antonina, and ran it through the staples intended to hold the rude bar of the door. The next instant the footsteps sounded on the garden path, and the next the door was assailed.

The good sword held firm, but the frail barrier that it sustained yielded at the second shock, and fell inwards, shattered, to the floor. Instantly the gap was darkened by human forms, and the fire-

light glowed over the repulsive countenances of two Huns who headed the intruders, habited in complete armour and furnished with naked swords.

“Yield yourself prisoner by Alaric’s command !” cried one of the barbarians : “or you shall be slain as a deserter where you now stand !”

The Goth had risen to his feet as the door was burst in. The arrival of his pursuers seemed to restore his lost energies, to deliver him at once from an all-powerful thralldom. An expression of triumph and defiance shone over his steady features when he heard the summons of the Hun. For a moment he stooped towards Antonina, as she clung fainting round him. His mouth quivered and his eye glistened as he kissed her cold cheek. In that moment all the hopelessness of his position, all the worthlessness of his marred existence, all the ignominy preparing for him when he returned to the camp, rushed over his mind. In that moment the worst horrors of departure and death, the fiercest rackings of love and despair assailed, but did not overcome him. In that moment he paid his final tribute to the dues of affection, and braced

for the last time the fibres of manly dauntlessness and Spartan resolve !

The next instant he tore himself from the girl's arms, the old hero-spirit of his conquering nation possessed every nerve in his frame ; his eye brightened again gloriously with its lost warrior-light, his limbs grew firm, his face was calm, he beckoned to the Huns with a mien of authority, and a smile of disdain, and as he presented to them his defenceless breast, not the faintest tremor was audible in his voice while he cried in accents of steady command—

“ Strike ! I yield not ! ”

The Huns rushed forward with fierce cries, and buried their swords in his body. His warm young blood gushed out upon the floor of the dwelling which had been the love-shrine of the heart that shed it. Without a sigh from his lips, or a convulsion on his features, he fell dead at the feet of his enemies ; all the valour of his disposition, all the gentleness of his heart, all the beauties of his form, resolved in one humble instant into a senseless and burdensome mass !

Antonina beheld the assassination, but was spared the sight of the death that followed it. She fell insensible by the side of her young warrior—her dress was spotted with his blood, her form was motionless as his own.

“Leave him there to rot! His pride in his superiority will not serve him now—even to grave!” cried the Hun scornfully to his companions, as he dried on the garments of the corpse his reeking sword.

“And this woman,” demanded one of his comrades; “is she to be liberated or secured?”

He pointed as he spoke to Goisvintha. During the brief scene of the assassination, the very exercise of her faculties seemed to have been suspended. She had never stirred a limb, or uttered a word.

The Hun recognised her as the woman who had questioned and bribed him at the camp. “She is the traitor’s kinswoman, and is absent from the tents without leave,” he answered. “Take her prisoner to Alaric, she will bear us witness that we have done as he commanded us. As for the girl,” he continued, glancing at the blood on Antonina’s dress, and stirring her figure carelessly with his

foot, "she may be dead too, for she neither moves nor speaks, and may be left like her protector to lie graveless where she is. For us, it is time that we depart, the king is impatient of delay."

As they led her roughly from the house, Goisvintha shuddered, and attempted to pause for a moment when she passed the corpse of the Goth. Death, that can extinguish enmities as well as sunder loves, rose awful and appealing before her, as she looked her last at the murdered brother of her murdered husband. No tears flowed from her eyes, no groans broke from her bosom, but there was a pang, a last momentary pang of grief and pity at her heart, as she murmured while they forced her away. "Aquileia! Aquileia! have I outlived thee for this!"

The troops retired. For a few minutes, silence ruled uninterruptedly over the room where the senseless girl still lay by the side of all that was left to her of the object of her first youthful love. But ere long, footsteps again approached the farmhouse door, and two Goths, who had formed part

of the escort allotted to the Hun, approached the young chieftain's corpse. Quickly and silently they raised it in their arms and bore it into the garden. There they scooped a shallow hole with their swords in the fresh flower-laden turf, and having laid the body there, they hastily covered it, and rapidly departed without returning to the house.

These men had served among the warriors committed to Hermanric's command. By many acts of frank generosity and encouragement the young chieftain had won their rough attachment. They mourned his fate, but dared not obstruct the sentence, or oppose the act that determined it. At their own risk they had secretly quitted the advancing ranks of their comrades, to use the last privilege and obey the last dictate of human kindness—and they thought not of the lonely girl, as they now left her desolate, and hurried away to re-assume their appointed stations ere it was too late.

The turf lay caressingly round the young warrior's form; its crushed flowers pressed softly against his cold cheek; the fragrance of the new

morning wafted its pure incense gently about his simple grave ! Around him flowered the delicate plants that the hand of Antonina had raised to please his eye. Near him stood the dwelling, sacred to the first and last kiss that he had impressed upon her lips ; and about him, on all sides, rose the plains and woodlands that had engrossed, with his image, the devotion of all her dearest thoughts. He lay, in his death, in the midst of the magic circle of the best joys of his life ! It was a fitter burial-place for the earthly relics of that bright and generous spirit, than the pit in the carnage-laden battle field, or the desolate sepulchres of a northern land !

CHAPTER VI.

THE GUARDIAN RESTORED.

Not long is the new-made grave left unwatched to the solemn guardianship of Solitude and Night. More than a few minutes have scarcely elapsed since it was dug, yet already human footsteps press its yielding surface, and a human glance scans attentively its small and homely mound.

But it is not Antonina, whom he loved ; it is not Goisvintha, through whose vengeance he was lost, who now looks upon the earth above the young warrior's corpse. It is a stranger and an outcast ; it is a man lost, dishonoured, abandoned ; it is the solitary and ruined Ulpus who now gazes with indifferent eyes upon the peaceful garden and the eloquent grave.

In the destinies of woe committed to the keeping

of the night, the Pagan had been fatally included. The destruction that had gone forth against the body of the young man who lay beneath the earth, had overtaken the mind of the old man who stood over his simple grave. The frame of Ulpus, with all its infirmities, was still there; but the soul of ferocious patience and unconquerable daring that had lighted it grandly in its ruin, was gone. Over the long anguish of that woful life, the veil of self-oblivion had closed for ever!

He had been dismissed by Alaric, but he had not returned to the city whither he was bidden. Throughout the night he had wandered about the lonely suburbs, striving in secret and horrible suffering for the mastery of his mind. There, did the overthrow of all his hopes from the Goths expand rapidly into the overthrow of the whole intellect that had created his aspirations. There, had reason at last burst the bonds that had so long chained, perverted, degraded it! And now, wandering hither and thither, he had dragged the helpless body, possessed no longer by the perilous mind, to the farm-house garden in which he now

stood, gazing alternately at the upturned sods of the chieftain's grave, and the red gleam of the fire as it glowed from the dreary room, through the gap of the shattered door.

His faculties were fatally disordered, rather than utterly destroyed. His penetration, his firmness, and his cunning were gone ; but a wreck of memory, useless and unmanageable,—a certain capacity for momentary observation, still remained to him. The shameful miscarriage in the tent of Alaric, which had overthrown his faculties, had passed from him as an event that never happened ; but he remembered fragments of his past existence ; he still retained a vague consciousness of the ruling purpose of his whole life.

These embryo reflections, disconnected and unsustained, flitted to and fro over his dark mind, as luminous exhalations over a marsh,—rising and sinking, harmless and delusive, fitful and irregular. What he remembered of the past he remembered carelessly, viewing it with as vacant a curiosity, as if it were the visionary spectacle of another man's struggles, and misfortunes, and hopes,—acting

under it as under a mysterious influence, neither the end nor the reason of which he cared to discover. For the *future*, it was to his thoughts a perfect blank. For the *present*, it was a jarring combination of bodily weariness and mental repose.

He shuddered as he stood shelterless under the open heaven. The cold that he had defied in the vaults of the rifted wall, pierced him in the farmhouse garden ; his limbs, which had resisted repose on the hard journey from Rome to the camp of the Goths, now trembled so that he was fain to rest them on the ground. For a short time he sat glaring with vacant and affrighted eyes upon the open dwelling before him, as though he longed to enter it but dared not. At length the temptation of the ruddy firelight seemed to vanquish his irresolution ; he rose with difficulty, and slowly and hesitatingly entered the house.

He had advanced, thief-like, but a few steps, he had felt but for a moment the welcome warmth of the fire, when the figure of Antonina, still extended insensible upon the floor, caught his eye ; he approached it with eager curiosity, and, raising

the girl in his arm, looked on her with a long and rigid scrutiny.

For some moments no expression of recognition passed his lips or appeared on his countenance, as, with a mechanical, doting gesture of fondness, he smoothed her dishevelled hair over her forehead. While he was thus engaged, while the remains of the gentleness of his childhood were thus awfully revived in the insanity of his age, a musical string, wound round a small piece of gilt wood, fell from its concealment in her bosom; he snatched it from the ground—it was the fragment of her broken lute, which had never quitted her since the night when, in her innocent grief, she had wept over it in her maiden bedchamber.

Small, obscure, insignificant as it was, this little token touched the fibre in the Pagan's shattered mind which the all-eloquent form and presence of its hapless mistress had failed to reach; his memory flew back instantly to the garden on the Pincian Mount and to his past duties in Numerian's household, but spoke not to him of the calamities he had wreaked since that period on his confiding master.

His imagination presented to him at this moment but one image—his servitude in the Christian's abode; and as he now looked on the girl he could regard himself but in one light—as “the guardian restored.”

“What does she with her music here?” he whispered apprehensively. “This is not her father's house, and the garden yonder looks not from the summit of the hill!”

As he curiously examined the room, the red spots on the floor suddenly attracted his attention. A panic, a frantic terror seemed instantly to overwhelm him. He rose with a cry of horror, and, holding the girl on his arm, hurried out into the garden, trembling and breathless, as if the weapon of an assassin had scared him from the house.

The shock of her rough removal, the sudden influence of the fresh, cold air, restored Antonina to the consciousness of life at the moment when Ulpus, unable to support her longer, laid her against the little heap of turf which marked the position of the young chieftain's grave; her eyes opened wildly; their first glance fixed upon the

shattered door and the empty room. She rose from the ground, advanced a few steps towards the house, then paused, rigid, breathless, silent, and, turning slowly, faced the upturned turf.

The grave was all-eloquent of its tenant. His cuirass, which the soldiers had thought to bury with the body that it had defended in former days, had been overlooked in the haste of the secret interment, and lay partly imbedded in the broken earth, partly exposed to view—a simple monument over a simple grave! Her tearless, dilated eyes looked down on it as though they would number each blade of grass, each morsel of earth by which it was surrounded! Her hair waved idly about her cheeks, as the light wind fluttered it, but no expression passed over her face, no gestures escaped her limbs. Her mind toiled and quivered, as if crushed by a fiery burden; but her heart was voiceless, and her body was still.

Ulpus had stood unnoticed by her side. At this moment he moved so as to confront her, and she suddenly looked up at him. A momentary expression of bewilderment and suspicion lightened

the heavy vacancy of despair which had chased their natural and feminine tenderness from her eyes, but it disappeared rapidly. She turned from the Pagan, knelt down by the grave, and pressed her face and bosom against the little mound of turf beneath her.

No voice comforted her, no arm caressed her, as her mind now began to penetrate the mysteries, to probe the darkest depths of the long night's calamities ! Unaided and unsolaced, while the few and waning stars glimmered from their places in the sky, while the sublime stillness of tranquillised Nature stretched around her, she knelt at the altar of death, and raised her soul upward to the great heaven above her, charged with its sacred offering of human grief !

Long did she thus remain ; and when at length she arose from the ground, when approaching the Pagan she fixed on him her tearless, dreary eyes, he quailed before her glance, as his dull faculties struggled vainly to resume the old, informing power that they had now for ever lost. Nothing but the remembrance aroused by the first sight of

the fragment of the lute lived within him even yet, as he whispered to her in low, entreating tones:—

“Come home—come home! Your father may return before us—come home!”

As the words “home” and “father”—those household gods of the heart’s earliest existence—struck upon her ear, a change flashed with electric suddenness over the girl’s whole aspect. She raised her wan hands to the sky; all her woman’s tenderness repossessed itself of her heart; and as she again knelt down over the grave, her sobs rose audibly through the calmed and fragrant air.

With Hermanric’s corpse beneath her, with the blood-sprinkled room behind her, with a hostile army and a famine-wasted city beyond her, it was only through that flood of tears, that healing passion of gentle emotions, that she rose superior to the multiplied horrors of her situation at the very moment when her faculties and her life seemed sinking under them alike. Fully, freely, bitterly she wept, on the kindly and parent earth—the patient, friendly ground that once bore the light footsteps of the first of a race not created for

death; that now holds in its sheltering arms the loved ones whom, in mourning, we lay there to sleep: that shall yet bound to the farthest of its depths, when the sun-bright presence of returning spirits shines over its renovated frame, and love is resumed in angel perfection at the point where death suspended it in mortal frailness!

“Come home—your father is awaiting you—come home!” repeated the Pagan vacantly, moving slowly away as he spoke.

At the sound of his voice she started up; and clasping his arm with her trembling fingers, to arrest his progress, looked affrightedly into his seared and listless countenance. As she thus gazed on him she appeared for the first time to recognise him. Fear and astonishment mingled in her expression with grief and despair, as she sunk at his feet, moaning in tones of piercing entreaty:—

“Oh, Ulpius!—if Ulpius you are—have pity on me and take me to my father! My father! my father! In all the lonely world there is nothing left to me but my father!”

“Why do you weep to *me* about your broken

lute?" answered Ulpus, with a dull, unmeaning smile, "It was not *I* that destroyed it!"

"They have slain him!" she shrieked distractedly, heedless of the Pagan's reply. "I saw them draw their swords on him! See, his blood is on me—*me!*—Antonina whom he protected and loved! Look there, that is a grave—*his* grave—I know it! I have never seen him since; he is down—down there! under the flowers I grew to gather for him! They slew him; and when I knew it not, they have buried him!—or *you*—you have buried him! You have hidden him under the cold garden earth! He is gone!—Ah, gone, gone—for ever gone!"

And she flung herself again with reckless violence on the grave. After looking stedfastly on her for a moment, Ulpus approached and raised her from the earth.

"Come!" he cried angrily, "the night grows on—your father waits!"

"The walls of Rome shut me from my father! I shall never see my father, nor Hermanric again!" she cried, in tones of bitter anguish, remembering

more perfectly all the miseries of her position, and struggling to release herself from the Pagan's grasp.

The walls of Rome! At those words the mind of Ulpius opened to a flow of dark remembrances, and lost the visions that had occupied it until that moment. He laughed triumphantly.

“The walls of Rome bow to *my* arm!” he cried, in exulting tones; “I pierced them with my good bar of iron! I wound through them with my bright lantern! Spirits roared on me, and struck me down, and grinned upon me in the thick darkness, but I passed the wall! The thunder pealed around me as I crawled among the winding rifts; but I won my way through them! I came out conquering on the other side! Come, come, come, come! We will return! I know the track, even in the darkness! I can outwatch the sentinels! You shall walk in the pathway that I have broken through the bricks!”

The girl's features lost, for a moment, their expression of grief, and grew rigid with horror, as she glanced at his fiery eyes, and felt the fearful suspicion of his insanity darkening over her mind.

She stood powerless, trembling, unresisting, in his grasp, without attempting to delude him into departure, or to appease him into delay.

“Why did I make my passage through the wall?” muttered the Pagan in a low, awe-struck voice, suddenly checking himself, as he was about to step forward. “Why did I tear down the strong brickwork, and go forth into the dark suburbs?”

He paused, and for a few moments struggled with his purposeless and disconnected thoughts; but a blank, a darkness, an annihilation overwhelmed Alaric and the Gothic camp, which he vainly endeavoured to disperse. He sighed bitterly to himself—“It is gone!” and still grasping Antonina by the hand, drew her after him to the garden gate.

“Leave me!” she shrieked, as he passed onward into the pathway that led to the high road. “Oh, be merciful, and leave me to die where *he* has died!”

“Peace! or I will rend you limb by limb, as I rent the stones from the wall when I passed through it!” he whispered to her in fierce accents, as she

struggled to escape him. “ You shall return with me to Rome ! You shall walk in the track that I have made in the rifted brickwork ! ”

Terror, anguish, exhaustion, overpowered her weak efforts. Her lips moved, partly in prayer, and partly in ejaculation ; but she spoke no audible word, as she mechanically suffered the Pagan to lead her onward by the hand.

They paced on under the waning starlight, over the cold, lonely road, and through the dreary and deserted suburbs,—a fearful and discordant pair ! Coldly, obediently, impassively, as if she were walking in a dream, the spirit-broken girl moved by the side of her scarce-human leader ! Disjointed exclamations, alternating horribly between infantine simplicity and fierce wickedness, poured incessantly from the Pagan’s lips, but he never addressed himself further to his terror-stricken companion. So, wending rapidly onward, they gained the Gothic lines ; and here the madman slackened his pace, and paused, beast-like, to glare around him, as he approached the habitations of men.

Still not opposed by Antonina, whose faculties of

observation were petrified by her terror into perfect inaction, even here, within reach of the doubtful aid of the enemies of her people, the Pagan crept forward through the loneliest places of the encampment, and guided by the mysterious cunning of his miserable race, eluded successfully the observation of the drowsy sentinels. Never bewildered by the darkness—for the moon had gone down—always led by the animal instinct co-existent with his disease, he passed over the waste ground between the hostile encampment and the city, and arrived triumphant at the heap of stones that marked his entrance to the rifted wall.

For one moment he stopped, and turning towards the girl, pointed proudly to the dark, low breach, he was about to penetrate. Then, drawing her half-fainting form closer to his side, looking up attentively to the ramparts, and stepping as noiselessly as though turf were beneath his feet, he entered the dusky rift with his helpless charge.

As they disappeared in the recesses of the wall, Night—the stormy, the eventful, the fatal!—reached its last limit; and the famished sentinel on

the fortifications of the besieged city roused himself from his dreary and absorbing thoughts, for he saw that the new day was dawning in the East.

APPENDIX.

BOOK I. CHAPTER III.

THE RIFT IN THE WALL.

As the author considers it possible, that the evidence adduced in the text regarding the state of the walls below the Pincian Hill, may not be considered sufficient—by readers who have never visited Rome—to exculpate the event on which the above chapter is founded, from the charge of overstretching even the pliable probabilities of romantic fiction, he thinks it necessary to subjoin the following extract from Burton's "Antiquities of Rome." On perusal of this passage, with its included quotation from Procopius, it will be found that the dilapidated fortifications of the Pincian Hill remained unrepaired so late as the sixth century, and are supposed to have first suffered from the effects of accident, or of insecure construction, as early as the time of Aurelian—one hundred and thirty-eight years before the period which has been chosen to originate the present romance.

"That which is called the *Muro Torto*, is a great mass of wall considerably out of the perpendicular, and is supposed to have been so in the time of Aurelian. Procopius, who wrote in the sixth century, gives an exact account of it, 'Near the Pincian Gate there is a part of the wall which is rent, the stones having been separated for a long time : and this rent does not only begin from the middle, but goes from the bottom to the top ; and makes the wall incline so much, yet without falling, that it seems both to lean out and to be

recessed back, owing to the rent and breach in it. Belisarius wished at this time to pull down the part which inclined, and rebuild it; but the Romans hindered him, saying that they knew for certain that St. Peter had promised to guard that place. This turned out as they had declared; for neither on that day, when the Goths attacked nearly the whole circuit of the walls, nor during the whole time of the siege, did the enemy ever come to this spot; nor was there any alarm there. I am certainly very much surprised that, during so long a siege, neither the enemy nor the Romans regarded this place: and the affair having since been deemed a miracle, no one has ventured to repair this breach, or build it anew: but this rent may be seen to the present day.”—*Description of the Antiquities and other Curiosities of Rome. By the Rev. Edward Burton, M.A. Oxford and London, 1821. Procopius Lib: III.*

BOOK II. CHAPTER I.

THE FAMINE.

THE events of the siege of Rome, introduced into the above chapter are thus historically related by Zosimus :—

After describing the nature of the blockade, the old English translation (already quoted from in Volume 1) proceeds to observe of the Romans, that “they resolved yet still to persevere, because they expected almost every day to have auxiliaries sent them from Ravenna. But when they found nobody came, and that they were disappointed of their hopes, they thought good to retrench the measure of the allowance of corn, (or other provisions) and to order that there should not be dressed, (or prepared for eating) above one half of what was formerly for each day ; and afterwards, when their scarcity increased upon them, a third part only. * * * *

But Læta, wife of Gratian who had been sometime Emperor, and her mother Pissumena, supplied a great many with necessary food for some time. . For, since the Treasury allowed them the provisions of an Imperial table, through the generosity of Theodosius who gave them that privilege, a great many received the kindness of those two women, and from them got that which fortified them against the famine. But the malady soon came to that extremity, as that they were in danger to eat one another.”—*Zosimus. Newly Englished. London, 1684.*

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